Film Quarterly

GEORGE KUCHAR TELLS ALL

ALEA'S *HASTA CIERTO PUNTO*

MISOGYNY IN HITCHCOCK

YENTL BILL FORSYTH

DIARY FOR MY CHILDREN

SPRING 1985

$2.75

Masters of Light

Conversations with Contemporary Cinematographers

DENNIS SCHAEFER and LARRY SALVATO

In the past two decades a whole new generation of cinematographers has emerged on the international film scene. Often using daring and original lighting and camera techniques that would have horrified oldtime Hollywood, directors of photography such as Nestor Almendros, Laszlo Kovacs, Michael Chapman, Vilmos Szigmond, Haskell Wexler and Gordon Willis have made a public mark on the filmmaking process that was all but unthinkable in earlier years. The director of photography is no longer a nameless technician but a creative artist who uses lenses and lights instead of brushes and paints.

No other volume of in-depth conversations with the new cinematographers is available to students and moviegoers. Schaefer and Salvato have the technical knowledge of filmmaking, and the familiarity with the work of their interviewees, to make the interviews rich in practical detail as well as in stimulating discussions of aesthetic issues. Thus, reading this book is like taking a class from fifteen top cameramen—hearing their ways of dealing with the personal and financial pressures on the set, their canny observations about getting along with stars, their ways of preserving a consistent style, their technical rules of thumb, and their solutions to especially difficult lighting problems.

The camermen included have a wide range of backgrounds, attitudes, and styles. Taken together, the conversations in this book reveal the remarkable range of creativity and dedication demanded of the visual artist in the world of feature filmmaking today.

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CONTRIBUTORS

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SCOTT MACDONALD

George Kuchar:

AN INTERVIEW

During the fifties, when he was still in his mid-teens, George Kuchar and his twin brother Mike were regularly at work on the roof of the Bronx apartment building they lived in, dressed in their parents' clothes, producing, directing, and performing with their friends in a series of bizarre 8mm melodramas. In *The Naked and the Nude* (1957), *The Slasher* (1958), *The Thief and the Stripper* (1959), *I Was a Teenage Rumpot* (1960), *Pussy on a Hot Tin Roof* (1961), *Born of the Wind* (1961), *Lust for Ecstasy* (1963) and other films, their considerable knowledge of Hollywood and their determination to make real movies even if they didn't have the money allowed them to transcend adolescent parody. By the sixties the films were being screened in downtown Manhattan art houses and recognized as landmarks in what Jonas Mekas was calling the New American Cinema.

In 1965 George—the brothers were working independently of each other by this time—shifted to 16mm and made the near-feature-length *Corruption of the Damned,* which was followed by his first 16mm color film: *Hold Me While I'm Naked* (1966), a 17-minute self-reflexive examination of himself as a young, frustrated film-maker whose suspicion is that most everyone is having a better time, a sexier time, than he is. *Hold Me While I'm Naked* is a sophisticated and memorable film by any standard, and its remarkable sense of color and design seems more impressive—and more prescient of New Wave style—every time I see it. In fact, there's been an unfortunate tendency to see Kuchar's subsequent work as a failure to live up to the promise of *Hold Me While I'm Naked:* Kuchar sometimes introduces himself to audiences as a film-maker who's considered "all washed up."

The truth is that Kuchar has continued to be a remarkably productive film-maker during the 18 years since *Hold Me While I'm Naked.* He has made, or appeared in, more than 60 films, and if some of this work is undistinguished, a considerable portion of it is first-rate. For me the best work includes a number of the funky melodramas which are the Kuchar staple—*Knocturne* (1968), *The Sunshine Sisters* (1972), *Back to Nature* (1976), *A Reason to Live* (1976), *The Mongreloid* (1978), *The Oneers* (1982), *Cattle Mutilations* (1983)—and several overtly diaristic and documentary works: *Encyclopedia of the Blessed* (1968—a film about Kuchar's friendship with Red Grooms and Mimi Gross), *Wild Night in El Reno* (1977—Kuchar has been known to vacation in El Reno, Oklahoma, to enjoy the wild thunderstorms there), and his documentation of George Segal at work: *House of the White People* (1968). Kuchar has always had an audience. There's a cult following in San Francisco and New York; Madison, Wisconsin boasts the official Kuchar fan club. For most of those who know the films, Kuchar is, above all else, a camp humorist. Audiences guffaw at the ludicrous costumes and sets, at the outrageous over- and underacting, at the zoftig leading ladies and the geeky leading men, at the absurd plots and the cheap, raucous *mise-en-scène,* at the overly melodramatic music . . . That this sounds like a description of John Waters's approach is no accident: according to Waters, "George and Mike Kuchar influenced me more than anybody."[1]

Because the narrative situations dramatized in George Kuchar's films resemble the conventional situations of commercial movies and TV—especially romances, soaps, horror, sci fi, and suspense—there's a tendency to assume that the relationship between Kuchar as producer/director and his films is basically the same as the relationship between Hollywood producers/directors and their films. In one sense this assumption is correct. Kuchar is in charge of the films he makes: he writes the characters' dialogue, explains how he wants the actors to play their roles, and so on.

George Kuchar directing THE POWER OF THE PRESS, *a low-budget classroom project*

And yet, the immense financial discrepancy between Kuchar's films and the big-budget Hollywood product they seem to mimic has resulted in an essential difference. Because Kuchar does not pay his casts and crews, he has needed to rely on friends and family. I'm tempted to say he's been *forced* to work with people he knows, but what may originally have been a matter of necessity has become his consistent choice. At various times his reputation has probably been strong enough to earn him a chance to make big-budget films, but his decision has always been to allow the films to emerge as amateur productions out of his everyday life. The result is that while Kuchar brings a thorough awareness of the gestures and means of conventional commercial fiction film to his productions, the results are as diaristic as they are fictional. The faces, bodies, and gestures of Kuchar's actors, and their environments, may seem bizarre, even outrageous in their failure to live up to the standards implied by the filmic forms Kuchar is using; but these are, in fact, the real people and places Kuchar knows, and the stories they enact are based on Kuchar's experiences. For years I was troubled by my general inability to remember which Kuchar titles go with which Kuchar films, or even to remember one film as distinct from another. I can see now that my difficulties have a good deal to do with the fact that for Kuchar the films are periodic releases in a continuous psychic flow, which use the conventions common to commercial movies as a formal structure.

One might ask, why bother with the ludicrous, campy sets and costumes? If the films are episodes from a dramatized diary, why not let everyone look themselves—why design costumes and sets at all? Well, for one thing, as Kuchar seems fully aware, everyday life can no longer be detached from the imagery that commercial film and television provide in such abundance. When we look in a mirror, our vision is powerfully informed by media standards we cannot escape: we see so many perfect-looking, perfectly dressed people in films and on TV that we can't help seeing and judging ourselves according to the standards they provide, or which are provided through them. Even when we don't try to look like the stars, we find ourselves dressing in clothes modelled on theirs, making gestures and setting goals reminiscent of theirs. Surely

one of the psychologically destructive ironies of contemporary life is that our attempts to be entertained tend to provide us not only with the thrill of identifying with this or that fantasy life, but with a continuing reaffirmation of our personal inadequacies. Kuchar's characters are everyday people like ourselves. Some of them are very attractive: Donna Kerness's sultry, sensual presence invigorates a number of the midsixties films. But, even as we respond to Kerness, we recognize that she wouldn't do for conventional film and TV: she's a bit too chunky. And Kerness is the exception. By and large, Kuchar's people are "average-looking," and when we see them magnified by camera and projector, their "inadequacies" become more fully the subject than the narratives the characters are supposedly engaged in. The films' sketchy plots are pretexts which allow us to watch the performers' and characters' funny/sad attempts to live up to the standards of perfection the media Industry provides for their worship, as they struggle with the complex, frustrating shocks and mysteries of human experience.

While the gap between the high-tech industry product and Kuchar's "imitations" tends to create humor, it also educates the eye. Once I had laughed at Kuchar's uses of Hollywood sound and image conventions, I found that the essential absurdity of many of these conventions was more evident to me than ever before. In *The Mongreloid* we see Kuchar and his aging dog Bocko "reminiscing" about the experiences they've been through together. Again and again, passages of typical movie music (borrowed, like so much of Kuchar's music, from commercial movie sound tracks) abruptly begin and end, dramatizing the "inner significance" of the memories in the typical Hollywood manner. Because of the unusual brevity of these passages of music, however, we feel the abruptness of their beginnings and endings more fully than we would if the passages were longer, more precisely conventional. As usual, we laugh at Kuchar's revision of the convention. But once I'd seen *The Mongreloid* several times—and numerous other Kuchar films which use sound conventions in a similar way—I was seeing the imitated commercial gesture more clearly and more automatically as the absurd manipulative cliché it is. The more I've watched Kuchar's films, the more alert I've become to the grandiose silliness of much of the language of commercial cinema and of a mass viewership which has collaborated with Hollywood to learn to accept the most absurd renderings of experience as believable images of a way of life to be defended at all costs.

Nowhere is Kuchar's method of turning convention on itself more evident than in the area of special effects. In several of the forms of commercial cinema and TV that Kuchar uses as raw material—sci fi and horror, most obviously—special effects are crucial: if they don't "work" for the audience, the films fail. Whole industries have grown up to provide big-budget films with believable fantasy environments and frightening transformations. One would think, therefore, that an amateur with a few hundred dollars would avoid trying to compete with the commercial product on this level. And yet special effects are common in Kuchar's films. The 8mm *A Town Called Tempest* (1961), for example, includes an elaborate tornado sequence. On one level the storm is very funny because we can see immediately that Kuchar was using cheap plastic models and drawings. And yet, because this scene is developed with all the apparent seriousness and detail of a special effects scene in a sci-fi epic, the effect is multilevelled. What's most remarkable about the tornado scene is that, to a surprising degree it does work: Kuchar's awareness of the "correct" positioning and development of such a scene, his obvious determination to overcome his financial limitations, and his apparent faith in the viewer's good will toward his considerable efforts give the tornado sequence a charming if campy grandeur. Similar special-effects sequences are used in a number of Kuchar's recent films, most memorably to visualize the epic journey of the American pioneers in *The Oneers.* Kuchar's use of dime-store toys and a Woolworth's painting on velvet to "recreate" an epic sylvan scene in the manner of the Hudson River School, and his use of a flying saucer "flying" by means of a perfectly visible string to represent the arrival of pioneers from other worlds, are less elaborate than the tornado sequence. But they are very funny and, in at least one sense, more acceptable than the special effects of Hollywood films. Hollywood's full effort goes into making its fan-

George Kuchar with actors on the set of I Married a Heathen *(early sixties)*

tasies have the power (and residual impact) of real experiences. Even when historical topics are being presented, the industry relies on special effects, rather than research, to substantiate believability. As a result, the most ludicrous "myths" become American society's sense of its own history. But in *The Oneers* Kuchar does just the opposite. He re-presents the usual clichés, but "substantiates" them with special effects which provide humor in place of awe, and which have the residual impact of undercutting Hollywood's fabrications, rather than history itself.

I would contend that Kuchar's approach to film is essentially an attempt to humanize and democratize a medium which conventionally has been *for* the people (to a degree at least), without being *of* them or *by* them. One of my favorite moments in Kuchar's films is when a character enters a bathroom and finds a turd in an unflushed toilet. (The discovery is sometimes punctuated by loud melodramatic music.) On one level, these moments are perfect catalysts for undergraduate hilarity, reminiscent of Divine's eating poodle shit at the end of *Pink Flamingos*. But on another level, they are potent satire. Our experience of watching the "intimacies" of countless characters in film and television melodramas, without ever seeing them deal with a reality as fundamental as taking a crap, has made us vulnerable to Kuchar's gesture. And the implications are disturbing. In reality we see shit in toilets daily —it's one of the few things we automatically have in common as human beings; and having a look at what we produce is interesting, informative, potentially healthful. It's only other people's shit we find revolting, a reaction we consider a civilized given. But by making an everyday process something to be completely hidden from each other at all costs, we become characters in a sanitized soap opera, imprisoned by our own dependence on privacy and by the resulting fear of life in public spaces. Once one has seen one of Kuchar's prefabricated "turds," and laughed at that melodramatic music, however, this horror of others is one degree less powerful.

George Kuchar has shown that interesting, enjoyable, technically intelligent films, with a creative, distinctive sense of color and design, can develop out of communities of everyday people working together. He's demonstrated again and again that his commitment as a director is not the exertion of power, not a process of controlling other people or aggrandising himself, but an attempt to work with whoever is available and willing, to do the

most interesting film possible. In Kuchar's world anyone can, and should, be a movie star; everyone can use movies as a vehicle for self-expression and interaction. Sure, some of Kuchar's films are boring and unaffecting; in fact, as much as I like them, an hour's worth is usually plenty. And yet, that hour's worth of Kuchar is more fun and considerably more humane than the big-budget Hollywood films I've been throwing my money away on.

I talked with Kuchar for the first time at his home in San Francisco in 1981, then again, in upstate New York, in the fall of 1983, when he was on leave from his teaching job at the San Francisco Art Institute. At the time, he was recovering from a serious injury to his foot, sustained during the shooting of the Boston Movie Company's *Screamplay* in which he plays a central role.

These days any number of independent film-makers are trying to move into, or toward, the kinds of films the Hollywood industry is built on, and I'd guess they're having to work hard to learn the standard syntax of commercially viable feature-length narratives. You seem to have known since you were 15 just how to make a Hollywood film, and yet you're not in Hollywood. Why not?

Well, I dunno. I don't have much interest. If I make a picture, I like to have a good time, and if people were depending on too much money, I'd get scared. I think my films would wind up in the red. Plus going to work: I hate the idea of going to work. You go to work and you have to do a good job and be professional. You have to go to meetings. It's kind of scary; it takes the fun away from it.

But in a certain way your films are totally professional.

Yeah, that's true. But I might have a built-in destruct mechanism when it's considered work.

Has anyone from the industry ever approached you?

Well, a lady from Paramount wanted to see the films. She acted like it was going to be my big break or something. So I did send films, but they sent them back real quick, COD. [laughter] The lady sent a little card: "Thanks for sending your films, glad to know your work." And that was the end of *that*. I don't know, it's probably not my calling anyway. There are a lot of people making movies there, and they make very good movies too. I like starting from scratch, starting my own studio and stuff like that. It could change —who knows?

Some independent film-makers would probably feel that having to go to class and make films with students was less than a perfect situation.

Oh yeah? I gotta earn a living somehow.

But you seem to really get into it.

Well, I have to; I gotta earn a living. It's a little like going to Hollywood: you work with a crew; you do have to explain to them what the picture's supposed to look like. But it's only for three hours—you go in there for three hours, and you get out. You can try to pass on information, but you don't have to be too professional. The school supplies some of the money, and you put in some of your own. I suppose it is like going to work, but it's only six hours a week, instead of 8, 9, 10 12-hour days. Plus you can make a film any length you want. My pictures are like Hollywood projects, but on a small scale.

When we were talking yesterday about The Wizard of Oz, *about how the make-up used in that film hurt people's faces, your reaction seemed to indicate that the worst thing for you would be to have anybody get hurt during the process of making a movie, either physically or psychologically.*

Yeah, I don't think it's worth it. It is just a movie. I don't see why anybody should get hurt. But people are always emotionally hurt. That's one of the horrible things about film-making. They get their roles confused. Sometimes they think you have them pegged psychologically and that you're typecasting them. And the people they're acting with can be callous, too.

Are you hard to work with?

No, I don't think I've ever been. People sometimes complain that I'm too easy. They usually make fun of me. I'm always saying, "Excellent!" "Very nice!" They say, "We know it wasn't—it stunk!" [laughter] This is the cast!

But with movies you can put somebody's performance together. So, big deal—they stink one moment: you just look through the viewfinder and find out where they stink, and instead of doing the whole scene over again,

you redo that part, from a different angle, and splice it together. Since nobody's getting paid anyway, why should they be put through a horrible mill, and suffer to try to make it perfect?

Do you have trouble with cast members feeling that, since pretty much anything is OK, there's no reason to do a good job?

They can do a good job, but they don't have to suffer through it. Some people do a good job, some people do a lousy job. Those that do a lousy job you cover up. Either you don't show their face too much, or you have them wear heavy make-up.

Often you seem to want actors to do lousy performances. In Cattle Mutilations *David Hallinger seems so awkward about his own performance that it's hard to remember his character.*

I wanted to use David because I was borrowing his camera for the synch sound parts. Otherwise it's just no fair. And I like him. I think he has an honest face, like Rock Hudson. Remember Rock Hudson? He was considered a lousy actor, but they gave him roles. Douglas Sirk said he just had something about him that was honest.

When you went to movies in the old days, there was rotten acting, and you said, "That's a rotten performance." But sometimes even when it's rotten, there can be something interesting about it. And it's part of making pictures!

A few years ago I was doing some research on Erskine Caldwell. He wrote God's Little Acre, Tobacco Road, *and was wildly popular in the forties and fifties. When his books were coming out, they were assumed to be comedies. Everybody dealt with them as though they were comedies, even though* he *never thought they were comedies. He always thought you could laugh or you could cry at them. Whatever emotion you had was up to you. But from his point of view, the books were realism. Do you think of your films as comedies?*

I never say I'm going to make a comedy. The pictures have comical scenes in them. I laugh at scenes even when I'm making them. Picture-making is hard work, and you want to have a good time, so sometimes you do scenes where you have a good time. But I never tackle a film like it's a comedy. In fact I suffered through most all of the pictures. I mean making them I had a good time, but most of them were based on terrible experiences. I was a miserable wretch during certain periods, and those periods are documented in the movies.

Hold Me While I'm Naked

In some of the films, that personal dimension is really obvious; in others less so. It's very obvious in Hold Me While I'm Naked. *It's less clear in* Cattle Mutilations.

Yeah, but I'm taking an enema in *Cattle Mutilations.* That may just give you a hint! [laughter] Anyway, I never shoot a film like it's a comedy. I might laugh through it, but I never label it a comedy. Sometimes the subject matter is pretty serious. When the Film Forum showed my films recently, I didn't want to go to the show because I was afraid. But my friend Ellen said, "Ah, let's go," so I went. There were people there, which sort of surprised me. And it looked like a new audience, new people, and they were getting a kick out of it. But I was suffering.

I was reading this book about St. Martin de Porres, from Peru. He was a mulatto who became a saint. He helped the sick, and had this life of suffering. And he also made himself suffer. He used to have people beat him. It was a strange mixture of pain and suffering and religious ecstasy and healing and crazy miraculous stuff. I was interested in that, and when I went to see my movies, it was the same thing. I'd remember what happened during the period when I was making certain scenes, and how my life was going then—it was such a horrible tragedy; it was so awful [laughter] —and people were laughing.

I'm not saying that actual movie-making is suffering. Movie-making is very interesting; you really feel alive.

But you have to suffer in order to create the energy you need to make movies?

Yeah. Isn't it weird? I have a whole career based on suffering.

I always enjoy your films, but I don't remember them as separate from one another. They feel like some kind of continuing, externalized diary.

I know what you mean. It's a continuing saga. It's not good to have new traumas, of course, but it's good for films. Pictures certainly cost more than they bring in. They may make some money over the years, but it takes ten years sometimes. You probably have to have a psychological motivation, just to keep things going. And making movies is a good way to meet people. In a way it's your whole social life. You don't like to say that too much, because then people see your life too clearly, even though you mask the images somewhat.

Do you make one of your own films a year and one class film?

George Kuchar with neighborhood leading lady (early sixties)

I have to make two class films a year. I'll make those and then feel guilty because I haven't made any of my own, so I'll have to make one or two of my own.

What's different in making your own films and the class films?

I allow things to pass in the class films that I would not do nowadays in my own films. Certain performances and the cheapness of sets. Class films can really stink and you can really play it up. The class films are more like a throwback to my 8mm days. In a way I sort of like it. You're working with new people all the time, and you've got to invent new stuff.

I like a lot of things about your work, but my favorite is the extravagant miniatures you build for the big special-effects scenes in some of the 8mm films. The tornado in A Town Called Tempest, *for example. There are some of those scenes in recent class films. The waterfall scene and the images of the gunfight in* The Oneers *are terrific.*

Yeah. You know why I did those scenes in *The Oneers*? I didn't want to be in the classroom with those people. They were nice, but some of them were a little scary. I don't know, they were either too loud or too aggressive. They frightened me. I had to teach them, but I didn't want to be in a room with them, so I said, "Let's go up on the roof." So we went up on the roof and brought little toys up. My brother had one of those black velvet paintings in the house. He wanted the frames for his own paintings, and he'd throw away the paintings. When it came time to shoot, I said, "Don't throw away this painting; I want to take it to class." And I had some dolls in the house. So I'd bring all these things up on the roof and do scenes with *them,* because the students were a little scary. We had to do something. The class is three hours, and we had to keep busy. Then later it got better, and occasionally we went downstairs. You have to work, and you have to adjust yourself to the working conditions and the people you're around.

I'm not sure I can always tell the difference between the class films and your own. I assumed that The Oneers *was a class film and that* Cattle Mutilations *wasn't, but I wasn't sure.*

Oh, that's good. Usually people say they don't like the class movies because the people

are hamming it up too much or something, but I like the class movies. *Boulevard Kishka* is a class movie. And *How to Chose a Wife*—they spelled it wrong; they're always spelling things wrong. That's one of my favorites.

Are certain films—class films or others—rented much more often than others? I assume Hold Me While I'm Naked *is the most popular film.*

Yeah. And *Reason to Live.* Something about that movie seems very controlled.

The shots of San Francisco were beautiful.

Yeah. I was using 4X (400 ASA film), and I wanted to take advantage of it by shooting when there wasn't much light. A lot of that film is supposed to be at dawn, but I couldn't ask Curt McDowell to get up at dawn to do scenes, so we did them at twilight. There's a little more traffic in the street, but it looks nice. I always like the way cities sparkle at twilight, and I wanted to get that on film. Luckily they're coming out with all those new filmstocks; that inspires you.

Which other films are popular?

Well, *The Mongreloid* is getting to be a big hit. The one with my dog Bocko. *Back to Nature*—did you ever see that one? I like that one. Some people like it; some people don't. Sometimes people say, "That could have been a good picture, if you'd developed the relationships." I'm not interested in developing the relationships. It couldn't be more boring to me to develop a relationship. You can see that they're crackin' up. I wasn't interested in getting together with a writer—yuck!—who wants to do that?

Back to Nature began as a vacation film. It's two vacations put together. Before I moved out of my old apartment, I decided to take some footage of it. That was combined with some fill-in scenes. But I didn't want to have to make up a relationship—not for a 10-minute movie. How stupid can you get? I mean, if somebody else wants to write and develop a relationship, they can develop a relationship. But if you're going to make a movie, you don't have to do that old thing. You'd be sitting there writing, and it would take you a year.

Most of the more serious films do involve relationships, but mostly you dramatize the moment when somebody discovers that their lover is with another person, or some other shock. You seem interested in moments of powerful emotional turmoil, moments when people are thrown into themselves and are not interrelating very much. They're like zombies walking around, taken up with the pain inside themselves.

George Kuchar directing New Jersey sexpot in CORRUPTION OF THE DAMNED (1965)

You just do certain scenes that interest you, know what I mean?

When I was talking to Bob Nelson, he said that you have "taste," which allows you to tread the line between depicting grossness and being gross. He felt that you transform repulsive material into charming material, while people who try to imitate you often end up making films which are repulsive and gross.

Yeah. The subject may be kind of gross, but I like to film it in the most beautiful way—not just nice shots of grossness, but, you know, by just filtering the subject through me and through the camera, it should come out a little attractive.

I can't think of anybody whose sense of color and design is quite like yours. Are there film-makers who have been useful to you in developing this look?

Well, I don't know. If you use color film, sometimes the colors just turn out crazy. You

go to a house to shoot, and you can't change much around—it's somebody's house—so you shoot, and the colors turn out strange because of the way the film is printed or something. But you use it—that's the scene. Maybe my films look the way they do because everything else is color-corrected. Hollywood films are all color-designed and color-corrected. But in mine, nothing's color-corrected. Strange colors bounce on somebody, and you leave it in. Sometimes at the lab they apologize for the colors being weird, and usually I say, "Oh no! I like it. Leave it like that."

Of course, when you're filming, you have to think in terms of composition and movement. I enjoy that part very much. The subject can be kind of horrible, but I enjoy setting it up and photographing it, and if I see a certain color in there, or a lamp I like, I turn the light on—because you have to enjoy the photography element, and then it'll turn out kind of nice-looking.

Your films age well. When I first saw Hold Me While I'm Naked, *the color and design looked outrageous, but now it looks really beautiful. New wave dress and punk film have made it look good again.*

Yeah, that's right! *Devil's Cleavage* has a revival now because of the punk thing. They like the heavy make-up, and the costumes, and they like the subject matter. It's real loud. When it first came out, some people liked it, some didn't. Then it hit a period where everyone thought it was a grotesque horror. And now it looks good.

Your films are a little like John Waters's in that sense, except that you're not trying so hard. In his best stuff he's working like crazy to shock you, to gross you out, and he definitely does it. The films have a freaky elegance, but he makes you have to look at it through your hands.

Well, you can offend an audience. It doesn't matter. After a while you probably get mad at audiences and purposely want to make something horrible. At least you get a reaction. I don't mean that the audience is the enemy, but it's a very good thing if people hate your films, if you get bad reviews. It helps you to go on. Nothing's more crippling than a good review. It makes you real tight inside. So it's good if you're not neglected, but if you're also not too well liked.

I've always figured it would be the other way around.

No, no. You have to get bad reviews, so that you say, "I'll show them, the sons of bitches. They thought they could crush me!" Know what I mean? But maybe as you get older you get more sensitive.

I'm surprised that nobody's thought of blowing up some of your films to 35mm and distributing them. Would you want that?

No. Nobody signed releases. Nothing's legal. [laughter] So the hell with it.

But they probably would sign releases.

No, my pictures weren't made for big things. If I was to make a picture for big distribution, I'd have to start from scratch, and know I was going to make it for big distribution. Even people who run festivals, who say, "Well, he's made a feature film now—this will be his big break," take a look at the film and say, "Forget it!" I don't know if anybody could tolerate the films big like that.

I think a film like Corruption of the Damned *would be pretty amazing in 35mm.*

I don't know. It has intertitles. People aren't going to pay to look at intertitles again. Plus, the sound fidelity was hideous. I've got to do a remake of that film because I spliced it wrong, and it fell apart.

I Married a Heathen, a class movie, showed at a regular theater once. It was so unabashedly awful. We did our best to make this drama, but there were just too many words in it, and the scenes were kind of long, and the sets were just sheets hung up. A woman was supposed to be living in a condominium apartment. We had outside shots of a condominium. Then it switches inside, and it's like she's in a tent! And the characters look over each others' shoulders to read the dialogue which was scribbled on blackboards. One of the guys who operated the theater had liked the theme: people come to San Francisco, wanting it to be a place of new beginnings, and it turns out to be a rotten hellhole. He very much liked that, so he decided he would play it. And people came in off the street and saw this movie.

I got into that project because we'd done two class movies before, and we had used black-and-white, and color, and special effects; and the new term was coming and the students said, "We've got to do something new; let's

do synch sound, a talkie. Maybe it will take place at a party." And I said, "It's a great idea. Make a talking picture." So we had to do it. I wrote a screenplay, and I wrote too much—too much of a talkie, page after page after page. But there was no stopping, so we did it. And that comes across I think—the fact that these people *had* to make a movie, for some reason they were being forced to, and they were doing the best they could. And the audience accepted it after awhile, maybe because the movie theater itself, the Roxy, is kind of like a long tunnel, and it's in a crappy neighborhood. It's got a certain flavor which matched the movie. In a posh theater those films would be disgusting.

Do you spend a lot of time maintaining films? Are the 8mm films taken care of?

Well, the originals are in my mother's closet. I have such a backlog now. Some of the newer films are in labs, and sometimes I get terrified that the labs are going to throw them out or that they've lost them. Or that they're charging me money for them—then I'm afraid to check if they still have the films. So maintenance-wise, I'm completely terrified. I have no money to replace prints, or I keep saying I have no money to do that because I spend the money on other things, or I'm making a new picture, so I let everything fall apart.

Once this guy came from Italy, and he wanted to see the 8mm's, and I said all right, and took them out and realized that some were in horrible shape. So I eventually reedited them, and did titles. Sometimes you get depressed, and you say, "Oh, they're going to fade," or "There's going to be a fire in the house and they'll be destroyed," and you start worrying about that and then you don't want to make movies anymore. You wonder why you're doing it; it's all going to rot anyway.

Do you know how many films you've made?

Yeah. I think it's like 56 or 57.

Including 8mm?

Yeah. And including films I collaborated on with other people.

You do a lot of acting in other people's films. When did you start that?

In 8mm. I used to photograph Mike and he used to photograph me, so I've been in and out of films for 30 years.

In those days did other people use you in films?

Yeah, my friend Larry Liebowitz from the Bronx. He was interested in cannibalism and he made special effects like they're doing now in the splatter pictures—he started that 25 years ago. And then I acted in Bob Cowan's 16mm movies. When I went to San Francisco, people put me in movies. I enjoy the acting. I wonder if I would rather go to Hollywood as an actor.

It would be the same tension, wouldn't it?

I don't know. I have more interest in going there as an actor. I would have no problem with that. As a film-maker, I think I would be rebellious. If I was told, come down, you don't need a screen test, just come down and be in this picture, I could do it. But I couldn't do the normal route of acting. I couldn't go through auditions. I would have to be wanted. [laughter]

What was your role in the film you were shooting when you hurt your foot?

I was in the picture *Screamplay,* by the Boston Movie Company. Rufus Butler Seder is the director. I played the role of a manager of an apartment building in Hollywood, a greasy ex-weight-lifter or wrestler who lost his shape and is frustrated about it and always sort of horny, always trying to make it with the girls in the place. He falls in love with this nice young actress, but she's not interested in him and rejects him. He's a vigilante type, angry all the time. I tried to get into the role. I had seen Richard Gere in *Breathless,* and I had this inspiration that I wanted to be like Richard Gere, so I got a tan when I went to Colorado, and I was going to do weight-lifting and get into shape. Then I read in the script that I'm supposed to be falling apart and that I hate my stomach because it's getting too big, so I said, "Why the hell bother?"

When I got on the set, I decided I was going to be OK: I wasn't going to fall apart ahead of time. I was going to be a together person. Then the night before my big scene, I fell apart as usual. I was just a wreck. I knew my lines and everything, but I went through the thing in a daze, and I thought I was absolutely awful, and felt so sorry for them having paid the airfare to get me out there to do the scene. I was just so hideous, and I knew I said the lines horribly. Then nobody said any-

thing. I thought they were too embarrassed to tell me how horrible it was. I went to a restaurant with people on the crew, and said, "Oh, I apologize—I was so spaced out," and a girl said, "Whatever you did, keep on doing it; it was good." I said, "It was good?" Then the next day the director said it was really good, and I said I thought it was miserable.

It was constantly like that through the whole picture. I was always just hideous.

Are you believable as a heavy?

That's what I mean. One morning I got up, and I didn't feel mean at all, and I knew I was in trouble. I could not do this scene. And these people on the set were younger than me, and here I was, a 41-year-old, about to have a big breakdown and run off the set in tears. I went behind the set and slapped myself across the face as shock therapy, and said, "Get a grip on yourself! Get a grip on yourself! You gotta do this scene and you're not going to crack! It's too ridiculous!" Some way I got through it, and I did the big scene and it actually turned out pretty good; I really look furious. They were all happy, but I said to myself, "I can't go through this trauma every time the camera's going to roll; I'll be dead before the picture's ended!" And sure enough I ended up in a hospital!

When you were in New York during the sixties, you were one of the fixtures of the New York scene. Were you in contact with people like Jack Smith or Ken Jacobs whose work yours might be grouped with, or with Michael Snow or Ernie Gehr?

Well, we'd meet now and then. It was never a closely knit group. It was people who did work and knew about one another and occasionally got together and then called it quits. They'd be cordial. But it was a bunch of volatile people, some of them nuts—know what I mean? Very rarely did you have a get-together. I remember one at Robert Breer's house. There was a bunch of film-makers, but then one critic and one star started having a battle in the kitchen. You had a sense of unity which was sort of nice, but then of course everybody was so different. Everybody knew each other's work and would go occasionally to see each other's work. But it was no big school of film-making. Jonas Mekas was writing about films, and everybody wanted to get in the paper and be mentioned, and there were hard

George Kuchar as actor, in THUNDERCRACK!

feelings and stuff like that. In a way it was like a scaled-down miniature version of Hollywood.

Have you kept up with any of these people?

I saw one of Snow's films recently, the one on sound . . .

Rameau's Nephew . . .?

Yeah, that's it. That was very good. It had very good parts. I always like his stuff. He's got a sense of humor.

Do you show a lot of other people's films in your classes?

When they come as visiting artists, yeah. I can't rent them; we don't have enough budget. I have a collection of films that people gave me for acting in their films. Some Bob Cowan pictures, a Michael Zuckerman movie, a Barnie Blech picture—a lot of people who don't get shown too much. And I have a collection of movies I bought. *Zippy's Beach Adventure* (a chimpanzee makes mischief) and stuff like that. For my birthday somebody gave me a dramatic documentary about the Boston Tea Party. All the colors have faded; there's only browns and reds. And it's so horribly stilted. I play that in class. The students sit through that junk, and they see a different aspect of film. There are whole courses where you see regular films. But you can't see *Zippy's Beach Adventure* anywhere else, and *Perrot and the Vacuum Cleaner,* which is about this little puppet that shows you how to work a vacuum cleaner . . . unbelievably boring and unique.

What the hell, you can see all the classics, and you can get sick to your stomach seeing all the great stuff. And it is great stuff. But

you see enough of that. You've got to see the other petty, garbagy junk that's around, stuff that's been made and neglected, awful stuff. It's like a shot in the arm. It's fun to look at, and it often ends up being a new trend, a new style. The classics are great pictures, but enough is enough. You've got to have your system flushed out now and then. Am I going to show the students *Potemkin* and then talk about our class movies? With the kind of words I use and *my* accent? It'll be like a sacrilege or something. I can't do that, and I don't want to do it. I'd be putting on an act.

It's stupid anyway. Renting movies is expensive as hell, and you can put that money into *making* a movie. The students are stuck with me for three hours, so I try to take them out and work. Most people are very afraid of the camera, because it's technical equipment, and usually the people you get cameras from are rather intimidating; they like to badger big words around, and you think you have to know everything about the camera. It's too terrifying. Then you realize that the damn camera is made so that anybody can take the stupid movie, or you get a $2.00 book on how to make movies. Anyway, it's so simple it's almost dopey.

Are there kinds of films or specific films that are popular or critically respected that you can't stand? What makes for a film that you don't like?

I don't like an ugly film. A film that looks like it was made by an ugly person, with ugly intentions.

Do you have an example?

Let's see. What did I hate? I guess I go blank. I liked *Gandhi* and *The Return of the Jedi.* They ain't ugly pictures. I liked *Cat People.* I didn't think that was ugly; some people did. I can't think of a film I hated. I think George Lucas quit because he was tired of being hated. People hate you just because you make films. They hate your movie so they hate you. Isn't that awful? I never want to get into that. Big deal—it's only a movie. Why should you hate the person that made it? That's why I don't like going to those independent film showings with the film-maker there; there's always hate-filled people in the audience. [laughter]

I thought John Landis made an ugly film: *An American Werewolf in London.* I had to walk out. I don't walk out of horror movies, but this one had this horrible edge to it. He seems like a nice happy-go-lucky guy, but he seemed to take delight in mowing down the families, and shooting up his television and furniture, and in stabbing the nurse, and in having that nice looking guy go through the tortures of a man turning into an animal. I don't mind images that are kind of ugly, like in Carpenter's *The Thing.* I like that film. The people were so human. They were overly stoned and had lost their brains, and they couldn't battle this thing from outer space which was all sharp and all points and all bristly, a horrible-lookin' thing. They were just these overly mellow potheads, stuck in the arctic, trying to battle this thing. Something very human about it. But with some other directors I sense something of a brutishness.

Do you go to a lot of horror films?

Not any more. My heyday was the rubber monsters, the patently fake rubber monsters. I always liked that. And the lousy acting. And the black and white.

In some of the horror films my students take me to now, the grisliness of the killings is never matched by the motivations of the people, so it gets to be kind of funny. They're so grisly that I can't get into it; I laugh. But the students get affected by the new films the same way I was getting affected when I was going to see those rubber monsters: they're cringing and saying how horrible it is.

Women, often older women, are important characters in a lot of your films. Your mother is in Hold Me While I'm Naked *and other films, but I have no sense at all of your father. Were you close to him?*

Not that close. He was my father. And I was his son. [laughter] And he was very nice. He was interested in electronics, and he drove a truck. And he was interested in movies, the more erotic aspects of movies. The same way in painting. He was interested in history, in the world war he had been through. His experiences were so totally different from my experiences. Eventually, after I left home, we got to know each other a little better. But we were such different people—just the family kept it together. We never got to know each other, or if we did, it stopped at an early age, and we went our separate ways. My father used to work nights and sleep days, so every-

time I'd be home, he'd be asleep. The only time we'd get together as a family was dinnertime. Once he took me on his truck, and that was nice. He might have wanted to get out of the house more than be with us, know what I mean? When you've got two twins in the house, it's kind of noisy. And me and my brother probably wanted to be away from the family. It was up to my father and mother to get close—they were married to one another, right? He was only in one shot in a movie, in 8mm home-movie footage of a funeral that I eventually spliced into *A Town Called Tempest.* But he was all right.

One situation I really like, which shows up in a lot of the movies, is the one where a character comes into a bathroom and there's shit in the toilet. The shock of seeing it is usually accompanied by very powerful, melodramatic music, which makes it very funny. Yet it's so totally outside of any usual movie or TV reality. Your films are the first films I've seen that include that reality in a way which helps the viewer to think about it and deal with it.

It is a big chunk of your life. When I used to go to movies, scenes like that were always absent. Nobody ever went to the bathroom. I guess I rebelled against all those movies where you never saw a turd. Also, making movies you get kind of devilish after awhile. Right? You have your little quirks, and you have to have a little fun. So you might want to make a turd and place it in the bowl. Things like that. The turds in my pictures are never real. Except for a dog turd one time. I like to make them fake. And sometimes you get carried away, but then you realize that people are greatly affected by the image on the screen.

Especially by that one!

The enema scene in Cattle Mutilations *is shocking. The viewer is literally as horrified as the woman.*

Yeah. Well, nobody wants to see me taking an enema. It's the last thing in the world they go to the movies and pay money to see. They'd rather look away. I don't blame them.

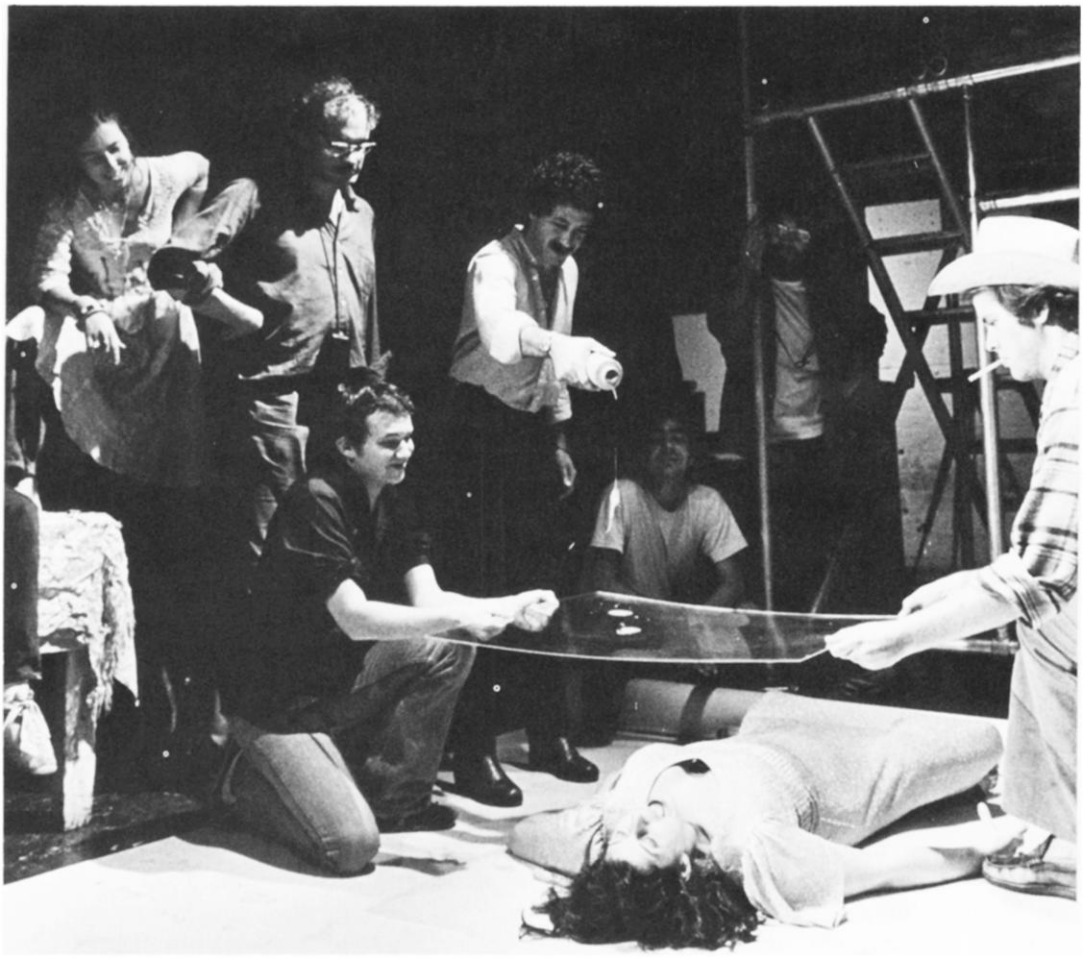
I wasn't supposed to be the one taking the enema. It was supposed to be Michelle [Inouchi]. In the scene now there's a guy on the telephone, listening. I leave the phone off the hook and say, "Wait a minute." The way it was supposed to be, the guy on the other end would hear Michelle taking the enema, and he would get excited—by hearing a lady taking an enema. And then he'd be repelled at his arousal at this kind of thing with the lady.

This was Michelle's first big talking picture, and one day I said, "Well, Michelle, this week we're going to do your enema scene." And she was horrified, she was so horrified. I saw her face drop, and then I realized, how awful! She wants to be an ingenue, and attractive, and she's going to take an enema? I was quiet for about ten minutes and just did small talk, then I said to her, "Michelle, you're not going to have an enema scene." I said, "*I'm* going to do the enema," and suddenly I felt very relieved. She was *immensely* relieved. And I felt very free because then I knew I could do all kinds of horrible special effects. I would be free to do that, whereas with Michelle I would have limited it. Then I realized when I was doing the picture, no, I didn't want to go too overboard. So, instead of her taking an enema and the guy on the other end of the phone hearing her getting an enema, he just hears her throwing up and *me* taking the enema. She discovers me, and gets sick, and he hears both of us—and seems to get turned on.

Have you had censorship trouble with your films?

Well, once in Boston, in the sixties, they closed the theater just because of the title of *Hold Me While I'm Naked.* People get offended all the time, even nowadays. Audiences like to feel offended, or they're not getting their money's worth. They watch too much television—television is about as bland as you can get. They think these are made-for-TV movies, where you're not supposed to be offensive. That's ridiculous. So stay home and watch television. They've got whole committees made not to offend you, and one letter gets sent in to television and they change the whole concept of the program. It's preposterous. Audiences talk in movies more nowadays, don't they—because of TV. Even underground films. They have no respect anymore. Thank god for Dolby sound, because they're blabbering a mile a minute. That's why you've got to make loud films, and big music tracks, and keep the sound track blasting: to drown out all that blabbering.

I think there's a whole new trend coming.



George Kuchar supervising a death scene for SYMPHONY OF A SINNER

There's going to be movies shown where the film-makers don't get paid and the audience doesn't pay; they go in and they get food and drink. And maybe there's a band that plays afterward. A nice friendly atmosphere. I think the hour-and-a-half programs are going down the drain. Going to them is like going to a strange mausoleum. The life has gone out of it. It's no fun anymore. In San Francisco they have some of these alternative kinds of theaters. You go in, and they have clams and spaghetti cooked up. You have that and then you go and see a 10-minute movie and you come out and there's a band. Storefront galleries like in the old days are opening up. They have home movie night; they have Super-8 night; and they have strange other programs. There's a certain life to it because it's in a neighborhood. Things are kind of primitive, and it's really fun.

I think of the original audiences for Méliès's films, or for Edwin Porter's or Winsor McCay's, as being similar to the new audience you're talking about.

Yeah. Going to pictures should be a big lively thing, not a dead event. Maybe you've got to go to a movie with nothing but people you know—close friends. The well-known places now—the big commercial movie houses and the established independent film theaters—are like funeral parlors, where they're playing the corpses on the screen.

NOTES

1. Scott MacDonald, "John Waters' Divine Comedy," *Artforum,* Vol. 20 (January 1982), p. 54.

SCOTT L. MALCOMSON

Modernism Comes to the Cabbage Patch

BILL FORSYTH AND THE "SCOTTISH CINEMA"

In 1982 there was an event at the Edinburgh International Film Festival called Scotch Reels. It was intended as an inspection of the representations of Scotland in film, and an attempt to create an historical/critical context out of which might emerge a Scottish cinema. Given the Left political orientation of the EIFF staff and others involved in putting together Scotch Reels, a "progressive" cinema was being proposed, in opposition to the dominant modes of South Britain (so to speak) and, looming rather vaguely behind that, Hollywood. The event and the book that came out of it (*Scotch Reels,* London: BFI, 1982) have succeeded, for better or worse, in establishing the critical parameters within which much of the serious discussion of Scottish film culture takes place. At the same time, the films of Bill Forsyth—*That Sinking Feeling* (1979), *Gregory's Girl* (1980), *Local Hero* (1982), *Comfort and Joy* (1984)—have been the most popular and most widely distributed representations of the current Scottish cinema; to a large extent his work has proven that distinctly Scottish films can be commercially viable. Indeed, it is their "Scottishness" that reviewers often fall back on in trying to explain the appeal of Forsyth's anarchically funny, subtly wise films. This is unfair to Forsyth; his brilliant, and brilliantly cinematic, sense of humor is not an easy by-product of being Scottish. In any case, his crucial place in the development of Scottish film has given him a considerable burden of cultural responsibility—hence his importance to the Scotch Reels project.

Broadly, the Scotch Reels event sought to establish: (1) that filmic representations of Scotland had generally fallen into two "frozen discourses" labelled Tartanry and Kailyard; (2) that these discourses have perpetuated a representation of Scotland as politically and culturally irrelevant; (3) that a debate is needed to discover how these discourses might be overcome by progressive (Left) modes of cinematic representation.

Tartanry and Kailyard, usually slurred together in critical practice, are a convenient summation of a few hundred years of Scottish literature evolving into Scottish film—from *Waverley* to *Brigadoon* and beyond. Tartanry is descended from the work of Sir Walter Scott, specifically the romantic historical novels set in the uneasy period when Scotland was settling into union with England; the key historical event of Tartanry is the disastrous 1745 uprising of the Highlanders against the English king, and the key figure that of the failed Pretender to the throne, Bonnie Prince Charlie. The political discourse of Tartanry is based on a mythicized past of brave but unsuccessful heroes. Because it is mythic and past, the argument goes, it suggests a present of diminished capacity where political power and cultural greatness are historicized and thereby made inaccessible. The fact that the historical events concerned ran against the tide of history lends an added measure of impotence. The cultural manifestations of Tartanry range from Scott's novels to Scott's Porridge Oats boxes to films like *Rob Roy the Highland Rogue* and *The Master of Ballantrae.*

The chief literary origin of Kailyard was J. M. Barrie; the particular source cited by Cairns Craig in the first essay of *Scotch Reels* is *Auld Licht Idylls* (1888). Kailyard means "cabbage patch," and the Kailyard discourse is strongly parochial, concerned only with its own cabbage patch. Craig describes Kailyard Scotland, hemmed in by Calvinist prohibitions and small-town narrow-mindedness, as "a world of grotesquely impoverished human potential." Kailyard is humorous in that the joke is the sheer "couthiness" and parochialism of its subjects, who are being laughed at, in this case, by Scot-turned-London-sophisticate Barrie. The two most frequently cited examples of Kailyard in film

are the Mackendrick films *Whisky Galore* (distributed in the US as *Tight Little Island*) and *The Maggie.*

Although Tartanry and Kailyard are in many respects opposite—Highland Romanticism versus Lowland Calvinism—they are united in that they reinforce Scotland's cultural and political inferiority, notably to England, and create a political self-image that is fundamentally impotent.

> Tartanry and Kailyard, seemingly so opposite in their ethos, are the joint creations of an imagination which, in recoil from the apparently featureless integration of Scottish life into an industrial culture whose power and identity lies outside Scottish control, acknowledges its own inability to lay hold of contemporary reality by projecting itself upon images of a society equally impotent before the forces of history.[1]

This backward-looking combination of Tartanry and Kailyard leads to a certain poverty of the cultural imagination. Scotland, the argument goes, is unable to influence its own fate.

> But the forces which carry us forward are, literally, *unimaginable,* and the imagination has no choice but to find a secure location for itself in a past divorced from the present. The present, therefore, is lost to us: like sleep walkers we glide on the surface of life's deeps.[2]

It is likely that Tartanry and Kailyard are too convenient to be precise terms. The fact that they are so often used together suggests that, as a unit, they represent a little more than the sum of their parts. One writer on Scottish film has gone so far as to call them simply T/K. Taken together, they represent a tradition that is consistently self-diminishing, if not self-lacerating: a cultural tradition that dwells on its own parochialism, and a political tradition that dwells on its failures.

The class analysis of this cultural/political situation that Scotch Reels offers runs as follows: the union with England and its aftermath served primarily the desire of the Scottish bourgeoisie for advancement. The idea was that the best trade relations, as well as such slightly less tangible gains as social status for emergent bourgeois, would come through a firm political union. As it turned out, the bourgeoisie's identity was itself sacrificed, as well as Scottish nationhood. For the ambitious bourgeois, it was Scottishness as well as Scotland that had to go. Scots benefitted from union with England only when they ceased to be Scots. If Scots wanted to succeed they had to go south, trying to lose their accent along the way. The crushing of the 1745 uprising was the military finale to an economic and cultural drain that had begun in the previous century. Scotland could be looked back on fondly, in time-honored, time-bound "Auld Lang Syne" fashion; but it was not a place to be, to live and work. Thus the cultural discourses of Tartanry and Kailyard eased the abandonment of Scotland, ensuring alternately the romantic mistiness (Tartanry) or parochial backwardness (Kailyard) of the Scottish past, and the irrelevance of the Scottish present.

The progressive alternative offered by Scotch Reels is: (1) to recover the lost history of the Scottish working class (implicitly the Real Scotland), and (2) to figure out a progressive program for present and future cultural production that will move Scotland out of its bourgeois-constructed present of irrelevancy and Anglophilia and into a self-determined, socialist future. The first imperative is straightforward enough: the *Scotch Reels* articles by Douglas Allen and John Hill are efforts in this direction. The second imperative is a bit more complicated.

The theory is that Tartanry and Kailyard keep the working class down through impoverishing the imagination. They deprive the working class of any national (or nationalist) discourse within which they might imagine a future where they could exercise power or control over their lives. However, both discourses are quite popular with their victims: the Kailyardish *Whisky Galore* has long been a favorite, particularly in the Highlands, and that pillar of political regressiveness and country couthiness *The Sunday Post* enjoys a huge circulation. The problem here is a familiar one in theories of ideology: the incorporation by the oppressed of the cultural discourses of the oppressors. The difficulties posed by this notion vary with whether one spreads it with a spade or a butter knife. Tending to the former, the Scotch Reels writers and speakers face the question: where, if the working class is so thoroughly infused with bourgeois discourse(s), is the alternative to come from? After all, if one accepts that the Scottish working class has been poisoned from above,

then the alternative might also come from above—not surprisingly, the Scotch Reels writers generally, and in particular their chief theorist Tom Nairn, place great value on the role of intellectuals. However, in the film-intellectual quest for ever more political sophistication the working class seems likely to get left behind. It is doubtful whether any number of Scottish Straubs or Wollens or Snows—the ideals for Scottish cinema held up by Scotch Reels organizer Colin MacArthur —would be able to pry the cherished *Sunday Posts* from working-class hands. On the other hand, if one accepts that the working class has an active hand in determining its own culture, things get murky fast. One ends up talking about "compromise," and "progressive naturalism"—that is, the uncertain middle ground that most of us inhabit, between the present and the Revolution.

Which brings us, after some necessary distance, to Bill Forsyth. With one exception that I know of (Michael Radford's *Another Time, Another Place*), Forsyth's films are the only representatives of the "new Scottish cinema" distributed outside Britain. Within Scotland, he is certainly The Name associated with indigenous film-making. His films do not reclaim working-class history, nor do they attempt to impose or even suggest any program of Scottish political or cultural redemption. His work has not found favor with the Scotch Reels circle. What I want to do here is make a case for the value of Forsyth's vision of Scotland, and to assess its weaknesses. (All quoted material, unless otherwise attributed, is from an interview I did with Forsyth in July 1984.)

Specifically along the lines of Tartanry/ Kailyard, critical attention has focussed on *Local Hero*. The plot synopsis strongly resembles that of *The Maggie:* an American oilman (Burt Lancaster) wants to buy up a beautiful Scottish village in order to build an oil refinery; he is eventually persuaded by a canny beachcomber (Fulton MacKay) to instead make the area a natural preserve. The chief interest of the film is that it is a sustained and extremely funny undercutting of virtually the entire range of couthy Kailyard clichés. Colin MacArthur in *Scotch Reels* expressed concern that *Local Hero* was too near the "elephant traps" of the old discourse. What the film does is jump in and out of the traps, laughing and dancing. The black parish minister, the punkette at the *ceilidh,* the eagerness of the natives to sell out to the oil company, the urbane sophistication of the village innkeeper—all of these combine, notably at the level of characterization, to turn the Kailyard tradition on its head.

However, it remains true that the broader narrative repeats the Kailyard strategy of leaving the Scots in a kind of twilit irrelevance. The real problems posed by the oil company's designs on the village are resolved by the fantastic plot device of the natural preserve—which, as it happens, is a pretty good metaphor for the timeless sylvan marginality in which both Tartanry and Kailyard seek to leave the Scottish countryside. This disparity between the discrete elements of the film and its broader narrative occurs in all of Forsyth's films. Or, to put it differently, the oppositions and contradictions that are explored at the level of characters, incidents and lines of dialogue give way to misty, dream-like narrative "resolutions." *Local Hero* dismantles many of the Kailyard clichés, yet ultimately serves some of the main purposes of that "frozen discourse."

That Sinking Feeling shows, in bitterly funny detail, the impoverished lives of a group of unemployed teenagers. Forsyth's ensemble of acned losers all desperately need a way out of Glasgow's arid council-housing blocks; one of the film's funniest scenes has a teenage boy struggling in vain to drown himself in a bowl of cornflakes. The scheme that this group of friends finally settles on is a Big Heist of kitchen sinks ("ill-gotten drains"), a stratagem only slightly more likely than the breakfast-cereal suicide. But *That Sinking Feeling* is more than a send-up of heist films. Its urban-wasteland locations and genuinely tragic characters make the film more ironic than parodic. The intercut shots of tower blocks at sunset are suffused with over-rich color, a jolting visual commentary on the drab lives being played out in the film.

Gregory's Girl takes place in one of Glasgow's "new towns," slightly upscale from the setting of *That Sinking Feeling*. It is about the efforts of Gregory, a transcendently gawky teenager, to understand women. It is a gentler, somewhat less inventive film than *That Sink-*

GREGORY'S GIRL

ing Feeling, made with a higher budget and a much better script. Here, again, Forsyth plays off a familiar genre in creating a very original film.

However, as in *Local Hero,* the momentary insights in Forsyth's first two films dissolve into vague "resolutions." The success of the kitchen-sink heist in *That Sinking Feeling* creates a perfunctory and rather unsatisfying ending. In *Gregory's Girl* the main character's earnest attempts to comprehend women collapse into a kind of magical haziness in the final sequence, when he is shuffled along, utterly passive, by a series of dates who seem to be linked in a benevolent conspiracy to keep him confused. One could make an argument that Forsyth is abdicating political responsibility by letting the contradictions explored glancingly at the level of character or incident fade away before any generalization can be achieved. He has admitted as much—that he is not concerned with politics in making films, but simply with characters and situations. But if theories of ideology have taught us anything it is that one can be guilty by omission, and that "political neutrality" usually serves to further the dominant discourses (or version of what is reality, naturalness, etc.).

I will return to this argument a bit later. First, it is important to look at the very consciously anti-conventional aspects of Forsyth's style.

> The way that I go about making films is a reaction against what you could call the traditional English dramatically structured film, and also, especially, the English form of film acting. So I suppose I'm quite openly reacting against that. I'm doing that because of the relationship that Scotland has had with England. I suppose it's that inferiority that we feel, the Scots people, vis-à-vis England.

It is noteworthy that opposition to convention is articulated in terms of opposition to English domination. England/Scotland is a basic organizing conflict, in Forsyth's work as in much of Scottish culture (hence the preoccupation of the Scottish Left with nationalism). Particularly relevant to Forsyth's films is the linear, rigidly organized style of comedy associated with the old Ealing studios. However, given the similarities between English and other film traditions, one wonders if the England/Scotland opposition isn't, in Forsyth's case, a localized expression for what is in fact a more general rejection of norms.

In his revolt against traditional filmic drama Forsyth indulges only the most frail of story lines, on which he places the occasionally

quite arbitrary incidents that make up the film. Indeed it is this arbitrariness that creates some of the funniest moments, e.g., the choice of kitchen sinks as quarry in *That Sinking Feeling,* the lying-down dance scene in *Gregory's Girl,* the appearances of the rabbit in *Local Hero,* or the dentist scene in *Comfort and Joy.* The relative directionlessness of Forsyth's narratives is paralleled by the relationships between his characters. Communication between his primary (usually male) characters and the secondary characters seems always to be a great effort, as if they were all trapped in the thick moorland fog that Danny and Mac spend the night in in *Local Hero.* This difficulty of communication is relieved only in momentary connections, never conclusively—which may explain why Forsyth's films seem not to end, even though the slender plots are usually given slender resolutions. Taken together, these features constitute a style that is some distance from "the traditional English dramatically structured film."

However, the conventional narrative is not replaced by anything. Despite the formal linkages elucidated by John Brown (*Sight and Sound,* Winter 1983–84), there is no significant structuring principle used, except in that the avoidance of conventional narrative is itself a structuring principle.

> Really, I suppose the films boil down just to a collection of moments which may give the audience a certain amount of insight into either a character or a situation or a place or various degrees of each of them. And that's about all that I would want anyone to get from a film that I've made.

To use the Scotch Reels language, Forsyth undercuts the familiar discourses but he doesn't interrogate them—for to interrogate one must have a principle of interrogation, a line of questioning, if not a clear goal. The characters in his films seem very much, as in Cairns Craig's description of the Scots, to "glide on the surface of life's deeps." Forsyth has said that his style of film-making seems to him to be more reflective of "real life" than conventional narrative. To some extent the marginality that Forsyth's characters inhabit, relieved only by irony, fantasy and the chance communication, reflects a pervasive Scottish state of mind.

Comfort and Joy is the most pared-down

COMFORT AND JOY

portrayal of this marginality, which may be why I found it the least funny of the four films. The exclusive concentration on one character, a Glasgow disc jockey on a morning happy-talk program (Bill Paterson), is a departure from the earlier films. There is hardly a frame in which the main character is not present. The result is a much sparser film, one in which the meaninglessness of the character's life is amplified because it is not diffused by the significant presence of other characters. The central plot device is the disc jockey's attempt to end a running battle between rival ice-cream vending companies. "The silliness of conflict" is the main theme. Its furthest political extension comes in the world news bulletins that are played over sections of the film. As you listen closely to these bulletins you realize that the international crises that are being announced are between imaginary countries with Third Worldish names.

> The way that we perceive the world now, the world has almost become a fictional place. I bet the average audience would have to think twice about whether these countries were fictional or not. . . . It was the idea that we receive all this news about the world and it could be fiction for all half of us know.

One implication of this almost Orwellian view is that Forsyth's Scotland is extremely distant from the serious world of political conflict. The perceived political marginality of Scotland is the (unmentioned) context of *Comfort and Joy;* within that context, all conflict takes on a trivial cast. Conflict becomes a joke because it is merely banal.

> So his whole life seems to be contained in this level of banality. And that for me was the big

COMFORT AND JOY: *The villains about to attack Mr. Bunny's workshop*

joke in the film, that was the joke that lasted from the beginning to the end of the film. Anything else in the film was incidental to that.

However, political marginality is not a condition peculiar to Scotland. The lives of Forsyth's trivialized characters may be the modern experience par excellence. Having dismantled to varying degrees the clichéd discourses in which his characters might otherwise, in cinema, have acted, Forsyth leaves them in a discursive vacuum, in the same arbitrary way that the disc jockey's lover leaves him at the beginning of *Comfort and Joy*. The "normal" locus of social validation, work, is almost completely absent from Forsyth's films (as, of course, it is absent from the lives of Britain's 4 million or so unemployed). When work is shown in his films, it is usually either silly (happy-talk radio) or mad (the star-gazing oilman in *Local Hero*). But Forsyth's characters are alienated not only from the production of things, but from the (re)production of cultural meaning. They are deprived even of the structures of representation that had reproduced Scottish marginality. Freed from Tartanry and Kailyard, Forsyth's Scots are left with very little to do.

Colin MacArthur wrote that Scotland's film institutions "failed to keep a historic appointment with the discourses of marxism and modernism." It is certainly true that, in Forsyth's work (a Scottish film institution of sorts), Marxism makes no appearance. His Scotland is essentially classless. Although some characters are wealthier than others, no one seems to have power over anyone else. They are all Scots and therefore all powerless; power lies elsewhere. In *Local Hero,* power is located in the crazed isolation of Houston skyscrapers. In the other films it is, for the most part, simply absent. In *Comfort and Joy,* the assertion of power is rendered absurd. Powerlessness is central to Forsyth's vision of Scotland. This can be seen as politically regressive because his films do nothing to reveal the relations that create, and perpetuate, Scottish powerlessness. What Forsyth's films do offer is a dramatically unconventional, unsystematically critical, and very funny representation of life in the margin. If, in general, his films ease rather than sharpen the contradictions of that life—which is admittedly what Tartanry and Kailyard do, though in a much different way—that is not always a bad thing. After all, as capital continues to contract, we are, most of us, also being placed in the margins. Forsyth's rich irony at least eases the pain of that forced "irrelevance."

NOTES

1. Cairns Craig, "Myths Against History: Tartanry and Kailyard in 19th-Century Scottish Literature," in *Scotch Reels,* p. 13.
2. Ibid.

JAMES ROY MACBEAN

A DIALOGUE WITH

Tomás Gutiérrez Alea

ON THE DIALECTICS OF THE SPECTATOR IN

Hasta Cierto Punto

One would not be wrong to say that Tomás Gutiérrez Alea's new film, *Hasta Cierto Punto* (Up to a Certain Point, 1983), joins a distinguished list of Cuban feature films exploring that country's efforts to deal with the problems of a long tradition of Latin American *machismo*. Yet, to say only this, or to tag the film this way, would be to oversimplify what *Hasta Cierto Punto* is all about, for this probing, delicately nuanced film explores far more than merely *machismo*. And even this notoriously familiar phenomenon, scrutinized under the lens of Alea's camera, reveals some unfamiliar aspects of the problem.

Moving well beyond the stereotypes depicted in Humberto Solas's *Lucia, Part III* (1969), Alea's new film also succeeds in probing both deeper and more delicately into the issues of *machismo* than did Sara Gomez's excellent *De Cierta Manera* (One Way or Another, 1978) and Pastor Vega's fine *Retrato de Teresa* (Portrait of Teresa, 1979). For starters, Alea, unlike the other film-makers, does not limit his scrutiny to working-class *machismo,* as if that were all there was to the problem, as if it didn't exist at bourgeois levels as well. In fact, by no means the least of Alea's virtues—and one which sets him apart from so many of his film-making colleagues in Cuba—is his willingness to acknowledge and to scrutinize the country's lessening, but still very real class divisions. Thus, for Alea, *machismo* is a phenomenon which needs to be scrutinized up, down and all along the scale of prestige, property ownership and decision-making power which exists, albeit in a far less harsh form than elsewhere, even in a socialist country such as Cuba.

In many ways, then, *Hasta Cierto Punto* offers a kind of progress report on the Cuban revolution, with *machismo* as one index, a central one, certainly, but by no means the only index to be examined. The relativity of all notions of progress, however, is established right at the outset of *Hasta Cierto Punto,* which begins with one of the half dozen or so brief videotaped interviews with real workers Alea intersperses throughout the fictional narrative of the film. In this opening interview, a young black male worker questioned about *machismo* laughingly replies, "Oh, they've managed to change my attitudes on that score; I've certainly changed up to a certain point (*hasta cierto punto*). I'm probably at 80% now. Maybe they can work on me and get me up to, say, 87%. But they will never, never get me up to 100%, no way."

Immediately following this, the title and opening credits roll on the screen, while on the soundtrack we hear a male voice singing a song whose lyrics in Basque are translated in subtitles, and go like this:

> I could clip her wings if I liked.
> Then she couldn't fly;
> And she'd be mine.
> But what I love is the bird.

As both the opening credits and the song end, we are launched into the film's fictional narrative which involves a scriptwriter, Oscar (played by Oscar Alvarez), who is working on a script for a film on *machismo* to be directed by his friend Arturo (Omar Valdés). Both men are creative professionals in their mid-forties, esconced in successful careers and apparently stable marriages, and enjoying the modest perquisites, such as a small but comfortable home, a car, travel opportunities, etc., of bourgeois intellectuals everywhere, including socialist Cuba.

Arturo's ideas on *machismo* are quite simple. To him, it's a working-class problem; and the job of intellectuals such as himself and

Oscar and Lina in HASTA CIERTO PUNTO

Oscar is to raise the consciousness of the workers. Arturo's plan is to have Oscar, a successful playwright who has written a play on the theme of women's resistance to *machismo* (the ending of which we see performed in the film), research the issue among the dockworkers, where *macho* behavior is supposedly most flagrant. Oscar makes some preliminary contacts on the docks, videotapes some interviews with dockworkers, and observes a workers' council meeting where a young woman dockworker, Lina (played by Mirta Ibarra), speaks out animatedly and forcefully about safety hazards on the job.

Oscar seeks Lina out after the meeting, and finds her intelligent, articulate and extremely attractive in an unselfconscious way. He also finds her surprisingly nonchalant about the issue of *machismo* among the dockworkers. When he questions her about possible sexual harassment on the job, he is surprised to hear her reply, "Oh, the guys said a few things the first few days, since they weren't used to women working with them on the docks, but now there are no problems." When Oscar retorts that he has recorded some heavy *macho* interviews with some of the male dockworkers, Lina laughs it off with a good-natured "That's just talk."

What the *macho* talk in the interviews is about, interestingly, as we find out later in the film, largely revolves around the old double standard in marriage. This, however, is not a problem for Lina, who has never been married, although she has a son, now about ten, from a youthful love affair. Living alone with her son in a small but bright flat in an old house from which she commutes to work at the docks by ferry, Lina finds her life both challenging and rewarding, and she radiates the happiness of a woman confident of her abilities to cope with whatever life offers. In this respect, she upsets Oscar's stereotyped notions of the oppressed working woman. But she also upsets him in other ways as well, for her freshness and spontaneity, coupled with her down-to-earth working-class pragmatism, throw into sharp relief the bourgeois pretensions of Oscar's marriage to Marion, a successful actress who thrives on the adulation and special treatment accorded to those in the public eye.

Oscar soon finds himself living a divided existence, going back and forth from a wife, with whom he increasingly feels out of touch, to Lina, to whom he feels increasingly attracted. And this divided existence also involves him, on a daily basis, in experiencing life at two distinct levels of Cuban society: the working-class world of Lina and the bourgeois world he has been sharing with his wife.

The more sensitively aware he becomes of working-class life, the more Oscar sees that workers' attitudes and values just don't fit

the stereotypes bourgeois intellectuals hold of them. Consequently, he feels the need to alter the thrust and the overall conception of the films script he is preparing for his friend Arturo. When Oscar proposes that he make Lina the model for the film's lead character, Arturo's only response is the ironic, "Oh, sure, the woman with the fatherless kid plot: you want us to remake *Moscow Doesn't Believe in Tears?*" At which, both men have a huge laugh. But when Oscar presses ahead with his ideas of drawing more complex, more fully aware and progressive working-class characters, Arturo just gets angry that reality is messing up the clarity of his original idea, that workers aren't just *macho* brutes on the home front and corner-cutting, higher-wage-demanding louts on the work front.

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When Alea presented *Hasta Cierto Punto* at the 1984 San Francisco Film Festival, I had the opportunity to talk with him at some length. Our discussion began with a question regarding certain similarities between his new film and his earlier *Memories of Underdevelopment* (1968):

In Hasta Cierto Punto, *as in* Memories, *the central protagonist is a male intellectual from a bourgeois background who comes in contact with the working class, and who falls in love with a woman from the working class. Is the character of Oscar in* Hasta Cierto Punto *in some ways a continuation, fifteen years later, of the character of Sergio from* Memorias*?*

I don't think so; there is a big difference between these two characters. It is true that they are both intellectuals with bourgeois or petty bourgeois backgrounds, but Oscar in *Hasta Cierto Punto* is a revolutionary, and Sergio from *Memorias* could never become a revolutionary, as I see it. He's just an onlooker.

A voyeur, *with his telescope, looking at the revolution from a distance, furtively.*

Yes, that's it; he is just a *voyeur.* He is too old and set in his ways to join the revolution. But Oscar, on the contrary, is a committed revolutionary. Of course, he is an intellectual; and intellectuals come from the petty bourgeoisie, mainly. And in this respect Oscar is typical. But he is a revolutionary intellectual living *in* the Cuban revolutionary experience. He is committed to change; he tries to change.

Oscar tries to change, yes; but if we compare him with Sergio from Memorias *is there all that much progress? Have the Oscars progressed that much over the Sergios after fifteen years of involvement with the Cuban revolution?*

In many respects, yes, although perhaps not in this one area of their relations with women. In this respect there is some change but not much. At least, though, Oscar is aware of the problems of his own *machismo* and tries to struggle against it. In the end, we see that he has changed, but . . . *hasta cierto punto* . . . only up to a certain point.

Speaking of change, it is interesting to see how differently you portray working-class women in this film from your portrayal of the working-class character of Elena in Memorias. *There is a tremendous progress in self-awareness and self-determination on the part of Lina in* Hasta Cierto Punto *in comparison with Elena in* Memorias. *Would you say that women in general have made more progress in revolutionary awareness over these past fifteen years than men in Cuba?*

Well, let's put it this way. Lina is a worker, while Elena was the daughter of a worker. Elena didn't identify herself with the working class. She wanted to be an actress. She had her head full of bourgeois dreams. Lina, on the contrary, is a representative of the working-class woman in the midst of the revolution. She can be more or less conscious of her situation as a woman in society; but above all she is very fresh, sincere and spontaneous. So while there is a big difference between Elena and Lina it is not because we could say there has been so much progress in those fifteen years. Rather, these two characters have been different from the beginning, just as Sergio and Oscar have been different from the beginning.

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In *Hasta Cierto Punto,* the more time Oscar spends around Lina the more he realizes how deeply drawn to her he feels, and he begins to sense that Lina might feel the same about him. To complicate matters, however, word starts to get around, first on a teasing basis, later in a far more volatile way, that his hang-

Lina in HASTA CIERTO PUNTO

ing around Lina "the female dockworker" is not merely a matter of "research" for his script. When the teasing first begins, even Oscar's wife laughs it off as a good joke. But she is taken aback one day when Arturo's wife cautions her that men the age of Oscar and Arturo often go through a mid-life crisis in which they seek to assuage their gnawing sense of insecurity by "proving" themselves with other women. And Arturo's wife really shakes Marion up by confiding that this is exactly what she has to put up with of late in her marriage with Arturo.

On this score, it is interesting to see how director Alea handles developments between Oscar and Lina. While there may perhaps be elements of a mid-life crisis in Oscar's behavior, Alea does not in the slightest portray Oscar as superficially on the make. There is even a slightly shy, stolid quality in actor Oscar Alvarez's performance as Oscar. Then, too, there is in Mirta Ibarra's spirited portrayal of Lina a strong sense of Lina being just as interested in Oscar as he is in her.

In fact, the simplicity of Alea's handling of the initial love scene between Oscar and Lina is beautifully evocative. Lina invites Oscar for an improvised meal at her place one evening after work when her young son is away at a youth camp. When the still slightly hesitant Oscar finally works up the nerve to put his arms around her while she is working at the stove, Lina turns smoothly and radiantly into the embrace, without so much as dropping the fork with which she was stirring the sauteed vegetables. But after a moment's passionate embrace, when the two exit the frame arm in arm en route to their first lovemaking, suddenly Lina's bare arm reenters the frame, as she places the fork gently on the stove and prudently turns off the flame under the vegetables before returning to Oscar. This simple gesture combining passion and lucid pragmatism speaks volumes on the solidly grounded character of Lina; and it is an eloquent example of how delicately nuanced is director Alea's visual *mise en scène.*

Equally eloquent, however, is Lina's gesture, the morning after their first night together, of covering her head with the pillow when Oscar no sooner awakens than he makes a hasty bedside call to reassure his anxious wife that he is okay, that he'll be right home, that nothing is amiss. Lina's gesture makes it clear that for her this has not been just a one-night stand. Nor has it been this for Oscar, however, who gently removes the pillow, holds Lina tenderly, and asks simply, "Give me time to deal with this"—a request he will repeat several times throughout the development of their relationship.

Of course, when Oscar returns home that morning to his wife, Marion doesn't let him get away with trying to pass it off as "a night out with some of the dockworkers." And she lets him know that everybody has been remarking on the amount of time he spends with Lina. "How would you like it," she yells at him, "if I came back home one morning after spending the night out with one of the dockworkers?"

Oscar doesn't answer this question; nor does the film's plot take this turn—although it might have been interesting if it had. But the issue of marital possessiveness and the old double standard comes up not in the fictional narrative but rather in some of the videotaped interviews with real workers which Alea intersperses throughout *Hasta Cierto Punto.* One young black stevedore smilingly acknowledges that although married he's "out there fishing" for other women all the time. And if he makes a score now and then, that's fine; but he insists that his wife doesn't have the same rights to go fishing outside the

marriage. Male possessiveness is also the issue in a young black woman's interview when she recounts that her husband didn't want her to take a job after they were married for fear that she would start an affair with a co-worker. She says that she tried to reassure him that "a woman in love isn't looking around to start anything"; but he wouldn't listen, and forced her to choose between him or work. She chose work. And when the interviewer (who is Oscar) asks, "Is there no hope, then?" she replies, "For me, yes; maybe not for him."

Later in the film, however, some of the male dockworkers in the fictional narrative (but who may be real dockworkers as well) sit around after hours drinking beer and discussing *machismo* with Oscar. When the case of the guy who doesn't want his wife to work comes up, the men quickly turn the problem on its head. "The real problem is when the wife *doesn't* work," one man observes, "for that puts a real strain on the relationship when there's only the man's income to live on and build a family." The others agree; and to put things in another perspective one man tells the story of the worker who got married and insisted that his wife quit her job because he didn't want her flirting or carrying on with her co-workers. "Well, she stayed home, got terribly bored, doing nothing at home all day, so eventually she started carrying on with the milkman, the mailman, the electrical repairman, anybody who came along, because she was so bored." All the men laugh and shake their heads at this story, and agree that it's better all the way around when both the man and the woman work in a marriage.

Work, how work is organized, and who makes the decisions on how work is organized, form another major focus in *Hasta Cierto Punto*. In the film's fictional narrative there are numerous allusions to the frequent meetings of the workers' councils; and, as previously mentioned, we actually see one (fictional) meeting in progress when Oscar first observes Lina speaking out on safety hazards. In addition to these local, on-site meetings, which are monthly, the workers recount to Oscar that there are also quarterly regional meetings as well as the national ones—all of which provide them opportunities to compare notes with workers in other industries and to have their say about how things are planned and done. Or, at least how things *should* be planned and done—it being the case in Cuba, as elsewhere, that things don't exactly happen as fast or as efficiently as they ought.

It seems, from both the fictional narrative and the interview material in *Hasta Cierto Punto,* that one of the problems is an unresponsive Cuban bureaucracy. The workers on the job may point out exactly what is needed to increase productivity, but it can take months or years for the bureaucrats to requisition the needed equipment or even to prepare the paper work. Of course, this is not the first time Alea has made a film calling attention to the problems of an unresponsive bureaucracy. His *Muerte de un Bureaucrat* (Death of a Bureaucrat, 1966) was a comic tour de force in using humor to alert Cuban audiences to the dangers of the bureaucratic mentality. Today, judging from *Hasta Cierto Punto,* the problem lingers on, retarding Cuba's development, diminishing productivity, and leaving the workers with a nagging frustration when reforms they suggested long ago have still not been implemented.

In *Hasta Cierto Punto,* unlike the earlier *Muerte de un Bureaucrat,* there is no attempt by Alea to utilize humor in the struggle with bureaucracy. Here, whether the complaints against bureaucracy are voiced by fictional characters (such as Lina and her co-workers—although some of the latter may also be real dockworkers outside the film) or by the real workers who speak in *Hasta Cierto Punto*'s videotaped interviews, the complaints are expressed with a certain urgency and even vehemence. As I noted to Alea, one interview, in particular, struck me as very important. It is the last one, in which a male worker, black or mulatto, says "I will not compromise my standards. I will speak out when I see things being done on the job which hurt our productivity. If things could be done better, more efficiently, then I will say so, even if this is taken as criticism by some people, who will resent it. But the most important thing for me is my conscience. I may be a low level cog in the wheel of our economy, but I must do what I can, what I think is right." To me, this is a truly revolutionary attitude. Facing the problems, being open to change, being open to criticism of what exists, thinking of new

ways of doing things, being open to collective discussion of the issues—all of this, it seems to me, is the heart of the revolutionary process.

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Alea replied:

Well, I was stimulated by these interviews with workers. All these interviews are real, authentic ones; they are not prepared or scripted. They were filmed by me, and by the actor who plays Oscar. This particular worker of whom you spoke, he is a very tenacious person. He is an innovator. He is really a revolutionary in the sense that he wants to transform and perfect things. For example, in that interview he was telling us of the difficulties and obstacles he encountered when he proposed a new style of work among the dockworkers. He saw a way of making their work more productive, but he found that the bureaucracy resisted the change, because they thought that if the working procedures were changed they would also have to change the bureaucratic apparatus, so the bureaucrats resisted such change because they didn't want to have to do more work. On the workers' side, it would have been the same amount of work but more productivity. So he had to fight for more than a year to get those changes accepted, but he finally won.

What was this change, what new style of work was he proposing?

It involved unloading cargo from the ships and transporting it to the warehouse. They were making several movements with the machinery which were unnecessary.

Well, this is interesting. You know, in the USA during the forties and fifties there was a movement toward maximizing the efficiency of factory workers planned by bureaucratically by Frederick W. Taylor; and of course in the Soviet Union during this same period there was a similar movement planned bureaucratically by Stakhanov. But the important thing in this case, in Hasta Cierto Punto, *is that the initiative for change, the discovery of the problem and the discovery of a solution to the problem, comes from the worker. It is not some bureaucratic solution imposed from the top down. It is a very concrete proposal coming from the worker on the job. The irony, of course, is that this change is resisted by the bureaucracy.*

Yes, exactly. That is the problem.

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Alea doesn't tie up the loose ends of his story. The love between Oscar and Lina continues to grow; but Oscar continues to ask for more time before making a break with his wife. There are moments of passion and tenderness between Oscar and Lina, but there are moments of a kind of wistful sadness, too, between them, as they wonder how all of this will come out. Over drinks late one afternoon they sit quietly looking at each other, saying little, while on the sound track we hear a song sung by popular Cuban singer Pablo Milanés. The words of the song speak of the poetry of love, of the way the loved one embodies all the hope, all the poignancy of life, of "light and shadow in time," of "a promised cloud," of "foam on sand," of "the sun on me."

Throughout the duration of the song, Alea's reverse-angle cutting seems to shift the point of view of this sequence back and forth from Oscar to Lina, with the words of the song first seeming to correspond to Oscar's thoughts about Lina, then shifting to her thoughts about him, each feeling the same way about the other. At one point, when the song speaks of "the sun on me," Alea's camera catches Lina bathed in the amber glow of the late afternoon sun; and the song here seems to be voicing Lina's awareness of the beauty and poignancy of this moment shared between her and Oscar, as each realizes how much the other means to them, and thus how much is at stake in this relationship.

Things are not easy, however, for Oscar and Lina. In fact, by the end of the film things have gotten even further complicated. Oscar sees Lina's previous boyfriend leaving her flat one afternoon, which causes Oscar to create a jealous scene with Lina, who is in no condition to take such a scene, having just been forced to submit, against her will, to sex with her former boyfriend, who is furiously jealous of her recent attachment to Oscar.

At these developments, Lina can hardly be blamed for taking flight—and it appears, although one can't be sure from the rapid editing of the film's final shots, that Lina boards a plane, perhaps bound for Santiago

where her parents live and whom she has recently spoken of wanting to move closer to. But all this is left up in the air, literally and figuratively. Something deeply moving has been happening between Lina and Oscar . . . is still happening between them. But, for the moment, Lina has taken wing, like the seagull in the film's final shot, or like the bird in the Basque song at the opening of the film.

In a certain way, the ending of *Hasta Cierto Punto* seems similar to the ending of a play Oscar has written on the subject of *machismo,* the ending of which we see performed in the film. In this play, the lead character, a woman, tears up the script and throws it into the audience—almost *at* the audience—refusing to finish the play according to the script (which was written by a man), choosing instead to leave her own choices open. *Hasta Cierto Punto's* ending is similarly abrupt, inconclusive, open-ended; it is almost as if the lead female character, Lina, were tearing up Oscar's script, and as if Alea were tearing up his own script and leaving the ending open, tossing it into the lap of the audience. I asked him whether this was what he intended, on all three of these levels: in the play, in the film-within-the-film and in the film itself?

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He replied:

Yes, and I like so much to hear you say it that way, because it is not so easy for the spectator to find this relation, this set of relations. It requires some acute observation, which I have tried to encourage, to stimulate, without knowing if I would succeed in suggesting these parallels. You see, the play in the film was a real play by Juan Carlos Tabio. It is called *La Permuta* (The Transition). Tabio wrote this play basing it on an idea that came from me. Then we decided to collaborate on this film, and to incorporate the reference to the play into the film. We like this . . . to "play" with the play. Tabio collaborated with me in writing the script for the film, and we were very conscious of the many relations between the play and the film. And we hoped that the spectator of the film would be aware of these relations.

At a certain moment in Hasta Cierto Punto, *Oscar is reading in bed, and the book he is reading is titled* Dialectica del Espectador *(Dialectics of the Spectator) by T. G. Alea. Does such a book exist?*

Yes, the book exists.* But I wasn't sure audiences would be able to catch the title and author of the book, since the shot is only a few seconds long. It was a kind of joke. Oscar, the character, is a scriptwriter, who has worked in the theater and is now writing a script for a film. So I thought it would be useful for him to read such a book, which is about the cinema, about the dialectical relations between the spectator and the film. Since I recently published that book, I placed it in the hands of Oscar.

How are your thoughts about the "dialectics of the spectator" realized in Hasta Cierto Punto?

For me it is very important that the spectator not be passive, not be merely contemplative. I try to push the spectator in a certain way, to make him think, to make him try to resolve some problems that remain *after* the film.

Even during the film.

Yes, but the most important thing is that *after* the film he must continue thinking, he must continue working on issues that are raised by the film but are not resolved in the film. That's what we have tried to do in this film; and that's why the actress in the play which we see within the film throws the script into the audience, so the public will finish the story.

How has the Cuban public reacted to the ending of Hasta Cierto Punto?

I think it has been quite a good reaction, because many people have gone to see the film more than once; and that is a good sign, indicating that there were things still unsettled, still stimulating them to think, making them want to give the film a second reading. The film was popular in Cuba.

What was the reaction of Cuban critics to the film?

Among the critics it was not so well received. Some critics found the ending too abrupt. And maybe they are right. We could have developed the ending a little more.

The audience doesn't really know exactly what is happening. Lina seems to get on a plane; but even this isn't sure. We see only a

*An English translation is appearing in *Jump Cut,* nos. 29 and 30.

glimpse of the back of her (or of someone who looks like she could be Lina) boarding a plane. But this scene, this brief shot of her boarding the plane could be a thought *of Oscar's, it could be entirely in his mind, as he is wondering where Lina is when he can't find her at home.*

Yes, good, all this is intentional. It is good for us to think that Lina can fly off somewhere, she can fly like a bird; but it is not essential to know whether or not she lands somewhere here or there or how long she stays here or there. The essential is that she can fly, and that Oscar realizes this.

We were speaking earlier of bureaucracies, and I wanted to ask whether, in Cuba as elsewhere, there might sometimes be problems within the bureaucracy of the cinema. Within ICAIC (The Cuban Film Institute), for example, are there ever problems? One area I'm curious about is the choice of subject matter for films. For example, there seem to be a lot of films coming out of Cuba on the subject of machismo. *There was* Lucia *(Part III),* Retrato de Teresa *and* De Cierta Manera.

Yes, and my film *Hasta Cierto Punto,* which has a similar title to *De Cierta Manera,* is a kind of continuation of that film and of that style: it is even a kind of homage to that film by Sara Gomez.

Then, too, there have been other subjects treated extensively. For example, your film La Ultima Cena *(The Last Supper, 1975) was introduced by Pastor Vega at the Berlin Film Festival several years ago as one of a series of films exploring the role of blacks in the history of Cuban national development. Are such themes as* machismo *and the role of blacks "assigned" by a committee at ICAIC? Is there a kind of Five Year Plan, or a One or Two Year Plan, mapping out which themes should be treated in films? How free is an individual director to choose a subject matter entirely on his own and obtain ICAIC backing?*

Thus far, I have always chosen my own subjects. Right now, for the first time, I'm considering making a film on a subject proposed to me by someone else. So it's interesting for me to begin thinking about this project, a film based on Shakespeare's *Tempest,* proposed to me by the BBC. I'm now beginning preliminary planning to find out if I really feel right about this project; because

Lina in HASTA CIERTO PUNTO

if I don't feel it then I won't shoot it, I won't make the film. But right now I'm interested in proceeding further with it. I think it could be an interesting film, but it would be very different from the rest of my films. Now, I tell you this just to show that there is indeed total freedom to make a film of one's choice. Nobody assigns a director to make a film on this or that subject. It is true that themes such as *machismo* or the role of blacks in our historical development are prevalent; but that is just "epidemic," it's in the air, there is a sort of contagion that reaches us. All the films on blacks or on *machismo* were made spontaneously by different individuals. But the interesting thing is that both themes deal with discrimination. The revolution changes the social base, and, theoretically, there is legally no more discrimination, neither against blacks nor against women. But in the minds of people, prejudices linger on, and you have to fight them at another level, not with laws but by dramatizing it. And film is a good weapon to use in this struggle. And we filmmakers feel this, so it is very organic and spontaneous that we make films on these issues. It is not a program. Also, we have made many films about our history. Why? Because our history has been distorted for many years, and we need to show things that were omitted from our history books in school, before the revolution. At the same time, we also are conscious of the need to make films about our contemporary reality. Those lines are parallel, and we think they are both important.

JEANNE THOMAS ALLEN

The Representation of Violence to Women: Hitchcock's *Frenzy*

"Can Hitchcock be saved for feminism?" ask Robin Wood in a recent article analyzing *Rear Window* and *Vertigo.*[1] This is the question he would address, he says, if he rewrote *Hitchcock's Films* today.[2] The rerelease of five of these in 35mm to a largely art-house circuit has afforded the opportunity to resee and reappraise major work after a hiatus spanning the reappearance of feminism and the entrenchment of auteurism as the dominant film aesthetic in popular or journalistic critical circles.

Wood's essay is a major contribution—hopefully just the beginning—to the analysis of films from a male feminist perspective, aware of the limitations and oppression of *men* under patriarchy. Wood does not attempt to speak for women but rather to and for men who have gained from feminist criticism the awareness that it is not only women who are crippled by patriarchal inequity. While he acknowledges that in Hitchcock's work "there erupts . . . an animus against women and specifically against the female body, most grossly in *Frenzy,* even there it is troubled by contradictions that call into question the male drives and fantasies that provide the films' initial impulse."[3]

Curiously there has been no extended analysis of *Frenzy* (1971). The admission of misogynistic elements in Hitchcock, it might be argued, places us beyond the need to engage in detailed examination of the most blatant assaults on woman's body and consciousness. But the prevalence of film representations of physical and psychological violence to women and the continued auteurist lionizing of Hitchcock suggest the appropriateness of the project. I will argue here that *Frenzy* is not only centered on the victimization of women, projecting a point of view in which women's welfare and safety are negated, but that its black humor despairingly demonstrates the dread of vulnerability which men project upon women, sharing their fear and confirming men's need for control and dominance.

Before discussing the film and its rape-murder sequence in particular, references to critical reviews of the film at the time of its appearance provide a significant context for understanding the importance of the film in Hitchcock's career and the reinstatement of Hitchcock in the public eye as a suspense director who hit "pay-dirt" with stories of sexual psychopaths.

Critics welcomed *Frenzy* as a comeback for Hitchcock. *Time's* review, "Still the Master," claimed that the film "removes the doubt of the dim days of *Marnie* and *Topaz* that Hitchcock is still in fine form."[5] "The old boy has come back," Stanley Kauffmann announced to readers of the *New Republic.*[6] Penelope Gilliatt contentedly declared Hitch returned to the old form of the "Punch-Cockney thriller."[7] "*Frenzy* is the first good movie about a sex murderer since *Psycho,*" Vincent Canby remarked.[8]

Linking *Frenzy* and *Psycho* pointed to the sexual violence of both films. Gilliatt linked the two as did *Film Quarterly,* which noted that *Frenzy* managed to escape from the "dullness" that marked Hitchcock's spy thriller for a decade and to return to the suspense, malevolent wit and twists of terror in *Psycho.*[9] Kauffmann made the connection even more explicit: "There is the razzle-dazzle murder editing as in the *Psycho* shower, this time dealing with rape and strangling—a sequence that will doubtless become a 'classic' in editing classes for the easily impressed."[10] Two other reviewers noted that the only redeeming moment of interest in Hitchcock between these two films was the death swoon of a woman spy, "engulfed in billows of a purple gown."[11] A pattern of what constitutes cinematic excitement for these reviewers in Hitchcock's films seems hard to overlook.

Only two reviewers had some misgivings

about this line of continued interest. William Pechter saw the death swoon as anticipating *Frenzy* and reflected on the unsettingly erotic use made of a corpse in Makaveyev's *Love Affair* as "Hitchcockian."[12] The rape-murder scene in *Frenzy* was "extraordinary in its explicitness and blatancy," Pechter said; the director has exploited the new permissiveness to satisfy the audience's taste which he had heretofore subverted but not satisfied with sensationally horrific detail. Pechter doesn't take his disturbing reflection much further, but an unsolicited guest review for the *New York Times,* reacting to Vincent Canby's review a week earlier, made the conclusion from both the film and reviewer's response: "I suspect that films like *Frenzy* may be sicker and more pernicious than your cheapie hum-drum porno flick, because they are slicker, more artistically compelling versions of sadomasochistic fantasies and because they leave me feeling more angry and more impotent simultaneously."[13] No response to this review was published, but a film review appearing in the same issue as Pechter's nicely illustrated Victoria Sullivan's sense of what was happening in some critically touted films of the same period: "*Straw Dogs'* violence," the reviewer complained, "was jagged and unsatisfying—almost a repeated coitus interruptus of climaxes."[14]

Donald Spoto's exposé biography of Hitchcock was really the first critical response to take up and extend Sullivan's comments. Spoto traces a life of obsession with unattainable beautiful women (the icy-blonde syndrome), sadistic cruelty and inexplicable marital celibacy. Hitchcock's relationship with Tippi Hedren in *Marnie* and *The Birds* is the most overt acting out of this obsession. Spoto sees these incidents marking Hitchcock's personal and professional decline. The rape-murder sequence, Spoto wrote, "gives the impression of a film-maker eager to push to the limits his own fantasy and to join the ranks of the more daring (but in fact *less imaginative*) directors, whose excesses were just beginning to fill movie screens in 1971.[15] This fantasy of rape-murder, the expression of frustrated impotence, continued to the end of Hitchcock's film work in 1979 when he wrote yet another scene of rape-murder: "this was the last expression of the darkest desire that had occupied Hitchcock's imagination for decades—suggested in his very first film, *The Pleasure Garden,* and rendered most recently and most graphically in *Frenzy*."[16]

Spoto's book-length study citing the protracted violence to women in Hitchcock's films is very important in the wake of a virtual blackout on the significance of sexual violence in reviewers' comments. But the "ad hominem" approach seems objectionable to me and misses the mark of two more major issues than Hitchcock's personal or even professional life: (1) the metaphoricizing of women's victimization into a human universal, and (2) the ethical and technical sophistication of Hitchcock's self-consciousness in manipulating spectator point of view. Specific as Spoto's book is in detailing the way in which Hitchcock played out his obsessional fantasy "artistically," it easily slides into generalized sadness at the director's dim view of "the human condition."

> The technique of film-making is expert in this motion picture and Hitchcock used it to describe a world in which he had lost all hope . . . There is nothing appetizing about food or friendship, and all the relationships are sterile or aborted by murder. *Frenzy* is, to the last frame, a closed and coldly negative vision of human possibility.[17]

Misogyny is replaced by misanthropy in the critic's eyes and the victimization of women becomes a metaphor for the despairing entrapment of humanity in a cage of unsatisfied desire. In his important article on nineteenth-century melodrama, Thomas Elsaesser suggests[18] that the position of women as the suffering victims of melodrama presents a transposition of the middle class, itself dispossessed by industrialization and urbanization. In the process of making the comparison, the specific issues of violence to women and women's social class position drops out of consideration: once more, women as a cipher.

Secondly, explicit as the connection is between the subject matter of Hitchcock's films and personal details from his life, Spoto's lack of analysis of Hitchcock's narrational style ignores the director's skill in implicating the spectator in morally questionable behavior through filmic techniques of identification. Canby's review recognized explicitly that aspect of Hitchcockian narration in *Frenzy,* and the sequence in which Bob Rusk (Barry

Foster) attempts to extract his tiepin from the hand of his victim buried in a sack of potatoes has the same ("root for the villain") spectator manipulation as Norman Bates's anxious attempts to clean up after the shower murder in *Psycho*. But whether Hitchcock's narration induces a self-critical reflection in the spectator (as Robin Wood believes) or simply gratifies the desire to victimize women is difficult to determine.

The change in critical response to Hitchcock's films points to the importance, then, of analyzing textual cues for what they imply about spectator positions. I will argue that there is a calculated ambiguity in *Frenzy* supporting both male and female, victim and victimizer positions, but that both positions are finally not only questionable but objectionable in their pained denial of the possibility of trust and vulnerability. Before dealing with the question of audience response, we need to examine how the film presents violence to women structurally within the film's narrative and stylistically.

Frenzy manifests Hitchcock's familiar preoccupation with the distinction between "normal" and pathological behavior and personality. As in many of his films, he sets this up in at least two dimensions: as a function of the relationship between spectator and pathological character (narrational technique encourages spectator identification with that character) and as a function of the relationship between two characters in the film story who are both contrasted in their overt behavior and bonded by similarities in their emotional make-up. Like the two protagonists in *Strangers on a Train,* Richard Blaney and Bob Rusk, former Air Force buddies, are "mates" linked by facets of personality. Blaney acts out his anger publicly in numerous antisocial ways while Rusk appears an amiable businessman and friend who we later learn rapes and murders women. Blaney initially appears to be the more likely "villain" while Rusk's deceptive appearance represses the violence that explodes in private.

A divorced veteran working as a bartender, Blaney is fired for nipping drinks his boss alleges are unpaid. He gets support in his dire straits from Rusk, his ex-wife (Brenda) and current barmaid girlfriend (Babs), both of whom become Rusk's victims. Rusk initially goes to Blaney's ex-wife ("Blaney Marriage and Couple Counselling") to find someone who will indulge his sadomasochistic proclivities. But, turned down as a client, he forces himself upon her and kills her. Blaney's angry encounter with his ex-wife previous to this makes him a suspect in the murder, and the film becomes a triptych, cross-cutting between the stories of Blaney, Rusk and the police investigator pursuing the "sex murder." Rusk murders Blaney's girlfriend, Babs, and frames Blaney who is then convicted and imprisoned. Escaping from prison, Blaney returns to Rusk's apartment to kill him but "murders" an already dead woman victim in Rusk's bed just before Rusk returns to remove the body. Concealed behind the door of the apartment, the police investigator this time apprehends Rusk as the "true" villain.

I want particularly to analyze the rape-murder of Brenda, the tenth sequence of the film: its critical location in the narrative structure of the film, its own internal structure, and then individual dimensions of its style (dialogue, behavior, lighting, point of view). Hitchcock's showy opening, a helicopter shot over the Thames, sets the morbid-comic tone of the film by presenting a woman's nude and tie-strangled body floating towards a political gathering as ironically undercutting a speaker who is referring to the successful campaign to "clean up the Thames." A woman's nude body is objectified by anonymity and presented for our detached but curious gaze, conditioning us for additional objectified but more interested perusal. The remark from a passerby, a horrified "That's my club tie," suggests the rapist-murderer could be anyone, even the most respectable Britisher, and draws our attention to the tie just before the cut to Blaney in front of the mirror—tying a very similar kind of tie.

This opening has set the tone and also established the enigma that must be solved. Who is the perpetrator of the committed crime? With quintessential Hollywood and Hitchcock economy, expectation is set up to be fulfilled. But Hitchcock's narration here is self-consciously playful, more like Sterne of *Tristram Shandy* than the omniscient trustworthy narrator of most nineteenth-century literature and twentieth-century film. Blaney's qualities of character, particularly losing his

temper, suggest, almost too obviously, that he is a likely candidate for the title of notorious "necktie murderer." The audience is given plenty of evidence that Blaney is thoroughly unsavory and misogynistic.

Hence, Rusk's appearance (alias Mr. Robinson) at the Blaney Bureau is disconcerting. Hitchcock has been constructing the narrative to follow Blaney up to this point. What is the motivation to switch to Rusk when Blaney is not present? A substitution is suggested here through narrative structure implying a dual or split protagonist (the parallels between Marion Crane and Norman Bates before the shower murder), one of whom acts out the other's emotional impulse. (Does this evoke the childhood fear of omnipotence that someone "died" because the child "wished" they were dead?) The switch from Blaney to Rusk tends to set apart the rape-murder of Brenda from the murder in *Psycho*. Why are we suddenly following the movements of Rusk rather than Blaney? Eventually, of course, it answers the question of the identity of the rapist-murderer. In addition, it does not immediately precipitate subsequent action. The abruptness with which it is introduced and left makes the viewer all the more conscious of the way the sequence sets up and fulfills its own internal expectations.

The rape-murder sequence has four segments: a conversational prologue, a struggle ending with rape, Rusk's murder of Brenda, Rusk's detachment and departure. The four-minute conversational prologue begins as Rusk enters Brenda's office for "counselling" without knocking while she is applying make-up at her desk. This offers an opening for the "women are always asking for it" male erotic fantasy that provides the rationale for sexual aggression. A series of nonverbal cues show Rusk's behavior as increasingly and more overtly aggressive: he stands while she remains seated behind her desk, he walks around the office presumptuously pulling out a file drawer and fumbling with the files, he moves in familiarly and sits on her desk, picks up an apple at the same time that he promises that he doesn't "handle the fruit until it's his." His insistent claims for attention, met by her refusal, build to the explicit declaration that it is she as sexual object, not as a professional woman, that he is interested in. This segment

is shot in conventional shot-reverse shot style with tracking camera to convey Rusk's stalking movement. Brenda's attempt to use the phone provides a transition to the section of overt physical struggle and the rape segments which lasts some three and a third minutes, comprising 33 shots of approximately six seconds each.

This second segment evokes comparisons with the *Psycho* shower murder sequence not only because of its sexual violence content but because of its extreme fragmentation of a woman's body, although it presents nowhere near the graphic or design emphasis, the variety of angles, of the earlier film. Camera distance and angle objectify parts of her body with special emphasis on crotch, ankle and breast. A superficial comparison of the scene with a fight between two men in a Western demonstrates the difference; the Western fight features the entire body with angles to stress strength and power of movement. A significant similarity with *Psycho* however is a shot of both women prior to an act of violence with their heads thrown backwards: Marion Crane

extends her bird-like neck to the shower of cascading water, eyes closed and smiling; Brenda Blaney, with her arms pinned behind her by Rusk, faints into limp unconsciousness as he carries her to the chair and drapes her over it—back arched, neck extended. Conditioned by ritualized animal behavior to indicate vulnerability and trust and by Western European oil painting, this image is an important cue for the audience. Among animals it marks the end of aggression. Between people it invites trusting intimacy. Here it is the prelude to the horror of aggressive violation: the brief, almost subliminal, shot of the knife point at Marion's belly, the implied penetration of Brenda from the rhythmic movement of Rusk's body against hers.

The violation of both of these women by the intrusive behavior of men, overpowering and defining the situation, ignores the perceptions, feelings and desires of the women and projects male fantasy upon women's behavior. The image of that behavior is rendered ambiguous—if objectified and out of context—by the fact that pain and rapture may be signalled with the same gesture. But the difference lies in the use of force, the ability of one person to forcefully overcome the boundary of another self against the other's will rather than the willing drop of that boundary. Between two men a display of force is recognized and/or labelled as aggression, while male aggression against a woman is an assertion of male prerogative. Having defined women as chaste and virginal out of a fear and dislike of female sexuality and a need to control the transference of property from father to son, men justify sexual aggression as giving women what men supposedly know (better than the women themselves) that women want. Encouraged to ignore their sexual desires, women find their repressed will violated when it is suitable for men; women's will is doubly negated.

Explicit dialogue spells out the contradictions of his mode of male aggressive fantasy during the rape segment. Brenda Blaney, recovered from fainting at having her arms twisted behind her back, pushes Rusk backward with her feet and tries to escape. But he trips her and throws her into a chair where he pins her with his body and tears her clothing. She asks him not to rip her dress, and tells him that she will remove it, but he replies that he likes her to struggle, that she's "supposed to." "Some women like to struggle."

Brenda's request to remove her clothing herself makes an attempt to gain some shred of control in a context of physical force, but the gesture allows for an element of ambiguity and projection for the male viewer with its suggestion of submissive cooperation. Rusk rejects even the projected fantasy of consent; he must tear, violate, intrude to satisfy his need to dominate and control. Brenda's passive submissiveness, as she recites a psalm during the rape, seems to Rusk the reason for his failure to come so that it is "necessary" for him to strangle her to death in order to attain the passionate frenzy of sexual domination that arouses him sufficiently.[19]

Lighting is a crucial signal to the viewer in this sequence that Hitchcock is presenting an act of violence to a woman as a male erotic fantasy. Although the sequence takes place at mid-day, the lighting in the office is subdued and indirect with speckled shadows playing over soft-colored walls and furniture decorated almost domestically with a vase of flowers. During the physical struggle before the rape and murder, the lighting is more flat and harsh—daylight brightness—but returns to deep softening shadows featuring the contours of Brenda's body at the point at which Rusk rips Brenda's clothes and the camera fastens on her face reciting the psalm while she is raped.

The traditional lighting of woman as hallowed erotic object is nowhere more explicit in the film than it is in this segment. Rusk's sweating and ruddy face is lighted from the front while Brenda's head is backlighted. A

legacy of the nineteenth-century cult of true womanhood, backlighting to provide a halo around the head and hair and softening glow around the face has been standard Hollywood fare since the twenties. But it is curious that Hitchcock's preference is to reserve such lighting for this moment of sexual aggression and degradation in the film. Hitchcock's studio control situates the chair into which Rusk throws her in a position to provide "naturalistically motivated" lighting.

Point of view, conceived of in its most literal sense as the spatial position of the camera with respect to the characters and *mise-en-scène,* is largely outside of both characters, although some shots during the rape come close to an over-the-shoulder shot–reverse shot pattern. But during the third and briefest segment of the sequence, the murder itself, the camera assumes classic point-of-view shots several times from Rusk's position. This segment lasts approximately one and a half minutes with 45 shots averaging two seconds each. Failing to come during the rape, Rusk removes his necktie and strangles the horrified and stunned woman. His climactic orgasm is simulated cinematically by the pacing of the editing and the classic point-of-view shots looking down at Brenda's body beneath him, particularly her neck with head thrown back and turning violently from side to side. The sense of chaos, straining motion and "excitement" here is enhanced by a violation of the 180-degree rule: camera angles on Brenda's face from either side of her head. Point of view is nowhere so strong in this whole segment as during the murder. Several extreme close-ups of her face accentuate this but the closest shot of the entire film is of Brenda's eyes darting back and forth in the final moments of strangulation just before they are still in death (freeze frame).

Initially exchanging literal or spatial point of view between the two characters, the narrational power of this segment is unified and consistent in Rusk. Point of view as *mise-en-scène,* editing, dialogue and behavior—all the territories of narrational control—has maintained a male fantasy of sexual aggression. Now the viewer is forced to experience the murder from the position of Rusk, in order for the movie to "survive," to continue to have a consciousness, much as *Psycho* shifted to Norman Bates after he murdered Marion Crane, the camera literally hunting for another subjectivity to occupy. What this means for female spectators, while almost inconceivable, must be conceived. *Frenzy* is not alone in its classic point of view shots from the perspective of a man violently assaulting a woman. Such scenes are notable in a number of critically acclaimed films such as *Klute,* which perpetuate the image of the vulnerable woman as victim unless she has the patronage of the good male parent, the vindication of Patriarchy. What is profoundly disturbing about the rape-murder sequence in *Frenzy* is that it projects the male fantasy of "invited invasion" onto the objective reality of the situation: the setting, lighting, woman's behavior, perspective of the camera "eye." Audiences are encouraged to read film as a socially privileged representation of "reality"; photographic recording coupled with narrative as causal explanation. It is the objectification of a particularly pathological but culturally logical male subjectivity in patriarchy, and the film spectator, male or female, is unambiguously forced to share it.

The epilogue to the sequence in which Rusk regains his composure, finishes the apple and picks his teeth before leaving, lasts about a minute (five shots, the longest of the segment, as are the tracking shots of Marion Crane's murder by Norman Bates—perhaps on the model of relaxed postcoital heartbeat and breathing), allowing the spectator to regain his/her composure as well. The lighting is like the conversational prologue again, soft and intimate, Rusk's movement matter of fact and detached; Brenda's body in long shot,

the first in the entire segment, is grotesque, her legs splayed, her face contorted, encouraging the viewer to be as instantly detached from her person as is Rusk. She is objectified by death as much as by physical and sexual aggression. Eyes bulging, tongue protruding (Spoto quotes Anthony Shaffer as saying Hitchcock wanted to insert a close-up of the dead woman's tongue dripping saliva)[20] Brenda's appearance is a textbook study on objectification, arousal, dominance and detachment. Set into the story of Richard Blaney, the rape-murder sequence is Rusk's and the spectator's quickie, a concentrated rock video, an interruption, a gruelling/titillating but carefully paced ten-minute sequence, one of three Hitchcock was personally responsible for in a film which had lost his interest for the most part.[21]

The sequence closes with the camera following Rusk downstairs, panning to Blaney entering and leaving while Monica, Brenda's secretary, catches a glimpse of Blaney, passes him and enters the office building herself. The sequence ends with Monica's offscreen scream, noted and then ignored by two women passersby. The tracking camera movement here is important because it suggests a narrational connection to a subsequent scene in which Rusk offers Babs his apartment. In this scene the camera tracks with both characters through the streets from the fruit market to his apartment and follows them up the stairs, medium shot on Rusk's face behind Babs, until Rusk says "You're my kind of woman," just before they enter his apartment. Then the camera returns downstairs with a tracking movement that carries it through the front door and across the street. Having set up and paid off expectations for a male erotic fantasy of sexual aggression, Hitchcock draws attention to his control and the spectator's response to subverted expectations. In this narrator's ultimate power play, Hitchcock "bares the device" of his own narrational quasisexual power.

One could argue, as others have, that this moment of reflexivity is Hitchcock's textbook lesson to the spectator on his/her own voyeurism—following the position of Wood in discussing *Psycho* in particular. In this view, the ethical center of the narration is safely critical of voyeuristic pleasure at sexual violence. But this ignores Hitchcock's systematic ambiguity. How do we know that the narrator is "critical" rather than self-consciously aware, even affirming the pleasure or at least dependent on viewer moral stance? Spectator discomfort depends upon an ability to shift perspectives and a stance critical of dominance-submission structures of interpersonal relations. Furthermore, might not the camera's gesture of withdrawal be experienced as much as brandishing the threat of repeated violence or promise of conquest, triggering cues so that the previous sequence can be rerun in the mind (a haunting), as well as an instigator of self-examination and motivation? It is as a sort of musical "rest" in the continual onslaught of graphic violence to women that Hitchcock's occasional reflexivity must be viewed. Self-reflexivity implies no judgment of voyeurism; no moral position is implied.

Misogyny is evident in the film beyond its physical violence to women: *Frenzy* is unremittingly antifemale in its characterization of women. Its music hall/vaudeville wittiness (Laurel and Hardy attitudes toward women as threatening and demanding) is particularly insinuating because of the long tradition of schoolboy fear of female assertiveness and strength. With the possible exception of Babs, women in *Frenzy* are overbearing, hostile and suspicious. Brenda Blaney is annoyingly self-sufficient and successful in comparison with her maladjusted husband. Her secretary is an efficient and guarded witness who claims in arch tones, "In my job I've learned to keep a sharp eye on men, Inspector." What is amazing about her portrayal is that although the film offers the best conceivable justifica-

tion for her attitude, the latter is nonetheless undercut and parodied as a negative stereotype by the Inspector's defensive shrug. Woman's feelings and experience are undermined rather than justified in this most extreme of situations. Her keenness is not presented as either warranted or commendable but an unfairly aimed barb.

The woman who leaves the Blaney Marriage Bureau with her new partner is straight out of British music-hall comedy: huge, fat, ordering her little spouse around before they ever leave the office. The indifference of the two women who hear Monica scream implies women's repudiation of each other's experience. The receptionist at the hotel where Blaney and Babs spend an afternoon, not to mention the wife of Blaney's ex-RAF buddy, are all hostile and suspicious. Despite the evidence that Blaney merits suspicion from her point of view (he is also suspected by the police investigator, who is portrayed as an intelligent and sympathetic character), the latter is set off against her kindly, trusting husband. And finally, the police inspector's wife takes revenge for her passionless existence by torturing her husband with *haute* but grotesque and unsatisfying cuisine.

Perhaps because Babs is the only sympathetically portrayed female character in the film, her treatment in the potato-truck sequence following her murder (the third and last for which Hitchcock was personally responsible) is particularly distressing. A Hitchcock trademark not entirely but overwhelmingly aimed at women, black humor may be a safety valve for dealing with intense pain, but it is nevertheless a cynical means of abstracting or detaching oneself. The treatment of Babs's body as Rusk hunts for his tiepin among the potatoes is only morbidly funny because of Hitchcock's ability to make the spectator identify with the male murderer, the distressed Rusk literally breaking the fingers of the corpse in order to retrieve his pin. The detachment from the body of a character who has had a central position dramatically in the film is an extra degree of objectification of woman's body; here Hitchcock's grotesque, perhaps sick, humor works toward an unprecedented degradation of woman.

On this point Pechter's review is correct. The spectator is encouraged to find humorous the visible body of a character who has been sympathetically portrayed only moments before and is now abused and defiled. The shot of Babs's nude corpse dropping from a potato truck while a police car stops just short of running over it, followed by the close-up of her grotesque face, offers no "artistic" ambivalence for women. This is degradation extended beyond life, the capacity for objectification that makes sexual violence and homicide conceivable.

Hitchcock has us participate in this exercise in detachment and objectification far more than he comments reflexively on the implications of our ability and perhaps desire to do so. While it is true that his portrayal of male characters hardly arouses much sympathy or warmth either (Rusk and Blaney are unsavory protagonists but the inspector, ex-RAF buddy and others are certainly humane) they are not victims. The inspector who cannot assert himself honestly in his distaste for the food his wife serves hardly suffers a fate commensurate to that of the women victims. But while I do not want to suggest that women "represent" the human condition, their victimization absorbs not only male anger at their failure to satisfy and fulfill needs but confirms the fear and dread of vulnerability and trust as dangerous.

I have tried in this article to set aside the frequently cited Hitchcock wit and humor which beguiled so many reviewers at the time of *Frenzy*'s appearance in order to examine a fundamental core of misogynistic violence, psychological and physical, which should be traced throughout his films. Hitchcock films are sometimes clever, witty and intelligent. They are also profoundly hostile to women or reinforce their subjugation.

Years ago Phyllis Chesler's *Women and Madness* and more recently Carol Gilligan's *In a Different Voice* discussed the damage to women's consciousness done by continual discrediting or disconfirmation of their feelings and experience. This process which enables women's consciousness to be "colonized," is, I think, what Victoria Sullivan found so objectionable about *Frenzy*—that here it was insinuated into our consciousness in a more sophisticated and therefore more subversive manner, more difficult to defend against than

ordinary daily misogyny. We need to study the process not only in films like *Frenzy* but also in rock videos, magazine advertising and other categories of sexual violence and misogyny.

NOTES

1. Robin Wood, "Fear of Spying," *American Film,* Volume IX, No. 2 (November, 1983), pp. 28-35.
2. Robin Wood, *Hitchcock's Films.* New York and London: Macmillan Press, 1965.
3. Wood, "Fear of Spying," p. 31.
5. *Time,* vol. 99 (June 19, 1972), p. 70.
6. "Frenzy," *The New Republic,* vol. 167 (July 8, 1972), p. 51.
7. "The Current Cinema," *New Yorker,* vol. 48 (June 24, 1972), p. 51.
8. "Frenzy," *The New York Times* (June 22, 1972), p. 48, column 1.
9. Gilliatt, p. 52. Johnson, Albert, "A Fine Frenzy," *Film Quarterly,* vol. 26 (Fall, 1972), pp. 58-60.
10. Kaufmann, p. 22.
11. Johnson, p. 59. Pechter, William, "The Hitchcock Problem," *Commentary,* Volume 54 (September, 1972), pp. 77-79. "'Topaz' anticipates 'Frenzy' with a beautiful overhead shot of the Cuban spy collapsing as she dies, her flowing robe billowing around her like the petals in some accelerated view of the blooming of a flower."
12. Pechter, p. 78.
13. Sullivan, Victoria, "Does 'Frenzy' Degrade Women?" *The New York Times,* Section II (July 30, 1972), p. 9, column 1.
14. Johnson, William, "Straw Dogs," *Film Quarterly,* vol. 26 (Fall, 1972), p. 62.
15. Spoto, p. 514.
16. *Op. cit.,* p. 544.
17. *Op. cit.,* p. 514.
18. Elsaesser, Thomas, "Tales of Sound and Fury," *Monogram,* vol. 4, p. 3.
19. Wood, Robin, "Psycho," *Hitchcock's Films* (New York: Castle Books, 1965). Sarris, Andrew, "Alfred Hitchcock: Prankster of Paradox," *Film Comment* (March 8, 1974), pp. 8-9.
20. "Rape Culture," distributed by Filmmakers' Cooperative, New York, New York, 1970.
21. Benjamin Jessica, "Master and Slave: The Fantasy of Erotic Domination," *Powers of Desire: The Politics of Sexuality.* Ann Snitow, Christine Stansell and Sharon Thompson (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1983), pp. 280-299. Kaplan, E. Ann, "Is the Gaze Male?" *op. cit.,* pp. 309-327.
22. Spoto, p. 514.
23. Actually it is the Bad Mother—possessive, jealous and sexually repressive—who kills Marion Crane. Norman Bates is, in a sense, radically innocent of the murder committed by his hand.

Reviews

YENTL

Directed, co-scripted and co-produced by Barbra Streisand. Co-scriptwriter: Jack Rosenthal. Photography: David Watkins. Co-producer: Rusty Lemorande. MGM-UA.

Barbra Streisand's *Yentl* is the first major American film directed, coproduced, and cowritten by a woman—who is also its star. *Yentl's* status as such has been acknowledged and hyped in various publications. Interestingly, however, in a culture that prides itself on having liberated its women and supported their advances, not a single article or review has explored the significance of this first. Although Streisand's difficulties in making this film—as a woman, and, more particularly, as "Streisand"—have been discussed *ad nauseum,* no one except Pauline Kael has seen fit to ask if the film itself is noticeably different for having been so largely controlled by a woman; and not even Kael attempts to explain these differences. When a woman takes such control of a mass-market film, is the resulting work substantially different? And does it matter if that woman is Barbra Streisand?

Admittedly, these questions are difficult to answer with any certainty. Streisand's fifteen-year obsession with *Yentl* is almost as steeped in rumor as the woman herself, and undoubtedly her media-created image as the bitchy, difficult star has influenced the willingness of both public and critical establishment to accept her film as the work of a serious artist and give it the scrutiny it would merit as such. Further, the difference of women's film remains as difficult to define as the difference of "women's" writing—or as the difference of "woman" herself.

Whatever the difficulty in definitively answering these questions, however, *Yentl* is strikingly different from what Hollywood has offered, even in its other recent comedies of cross-dressing like *Tootsie* and *Victor/Victoria.* As the film details Yentl's relationships and quest for self, it questions the appropriateness of traditional sex roles and casts doubt on other cherished assumptions as well. In so doing, it makes accessible to a large audience ideas that have previously been broached only in the works of "serious" female fiction writers and academic feminist theorists. *Yentl* subtly suggests some rather

ordinary daily misogyny. We need to study the process not only in films like *Frenzy* but also in rock videos, magazine advertising and other categories of sexual violence and misogyny.

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new and disturbing things about life, relationships, and women, the future of all three, and the precarious position of the traditional man in the uncharted "new place" it projects.

Like Isaac Bashevis Singer's story, "Yentl the Yeshiva Boy," on which it is based, Streisand's *Yentl* is also the story of a young Jewish woman in turn-of-the-century Eastern Europe whose love of learning is thwarted by a religion which reserves study for men. This, along with her disparaging view of women and her disinterest in marriage, creates confusion about her sexual identity. When her father dies, Yentl disguises herself as a boy and calls herself "Anshel." Anshel befriends a brilliant student named Avigdor and accompanies him to his yeshiva. Constantly with him as study partner and friend, she unwittingly falls in love with him. For complicated reasons, however, she finds herself marrying Hadass, who had been engaged to Avigdor. After some time, the pressures of maintaining her disguise as Hadass's husband and concealing her love for Avigdor become unbearable. She leaves Hadass and travels with Avigdor to a neighboring town, where she reveals herself to him. Although Avigdor loves Yentl and would like to stay with her, Yentl refuses and sends him back to marry Hadass, while she goes off on her own.

Despite her adherence to Singer's basic plot, Streisand creates a film entirely different in tone, emphasis and purpose. "Yentl the Yeshiva Boy" is a rather bleak tale. For Singer, Yentl's confused sexual identity is "evil" and perverse, her marriage to Hadass an "act of utter depravity" that inevitably leads all three characters to misery and alienation.

Streisand's *Yentl,* on the other hand, portrays its characters with respect, and views Yentl's confusion with an extraordinary empathy. Refusing Singer's simplistic morality, Streisand creates characters and situations of psychological complexity, and resists drawing the distinction between normal and abnormal. This does not mean that Yentl's confusion is naively unproblematic. She begs her dead father for forgiveness, is bewildered by her erotic feelings for Avigdor, and regrets her willful deception of Hadass, whom she truly grows to love. However, rather than being the poisonous source of detruction and misery, Yentl's confusion allows instead for

Yentl before her escape from traditional role

exploration and discovery. In this process she creates a confident and independent self which derives its strength from love and relationship. To showcase this powerful new self, Streisand creates for it an objective correlative —a boat trip to her "new place," presumably the traditional symbol of discovery, change, and promise, America.

Paradoxically, it is just this affirmative ending that has been the target of so many negative responses. Critics and audiences feel that it simply does not fit, that it yanks Yentl out of her fairy-tale world and makes her into "—gulp—a [feminist] role model."[1] Perhaps the most caustic criticism was levelled by Singer himself, who saw the final scene as a complete betrayal of his story and of historical accuracy as well. He fails to see exactly why Streisand's Yentl turns away from Avigdor and her community to strike out on her own. Avigdor cannot acknowledge and encourage all that Yentl has become—a "real woman" who embodies what society has defined as both masculine and feminine traits. When she rejects his offer of a traditional marriage, in spite of her love for him, she displays an uncompromising strength in repudiating social norms and expectations to

live a life that offers more possibilities than the one she will leave behind. Streisand recognizes that the community Singer creates simply will not allow for what he sees as "deviance" —that is, a woman who wants to study as a woman without having to hide or view herself as an anomaly. But having experienced before our eyes the pain of being forced to deny her essential self, Yentl refuses to ask either her community or Avigdor to deny their souls and she refuses to indict their failure. Instead, she lovingly allows them their blindness, sends the man she loves back to Hadass, and chooses her own exile from a community she has transcended. And so, the only way the film can proceed with any emotional authenticity is to send Yentl on to a "new place."

What is far more pertinent than pointing out the weaknesses of critical responses is understanding their motivation. For *Yentl's* conclusion *is* somewhat disturbing—not because of artistic failure, but because Yentl's decision to refuse Avigdor's offer of a traditional marriage and leave her homeland is a radical departure from genre expectations.

Yentl is subject to several sets of genre expectations, all of which Streisand subverts. To begin with, *Yentl* is not a typical Streisand romance in which a strong, glamorous woman is abandoned by a less successful male. While such heroines have always evoked our pity, the message has been clear: strong women are punished with man-less futures. Yentl is too "strong" for Avigdor, but for once we are not encouraged to see female strength as a liability. Unlike Esther Hoffman of *A Star is Born,* Yentl does not say she wants "everything," just "more." Although this "more," cornerstone of the film, is left ambiguous, we know that it is something other than the traditional role and that it *is* Yentl's choice. And so for the first time Streisand plays a woman who chooses to leave her love interest so she might be free to realize all her "sweet imagined possibilities." Her "more" is thus presented as an alluring alternative to marriage with a man who would forever fix her within static categories. But because this "more" is so vague and suggests so many inversions of the normal, audiences sense in it a perplexing incorrectness: we are not being asked to pity Yentl, but to align ourselves with a quest far too dependent on the overthrow of traditional male/female organization to be comfortable.

Yentl also fails to satisfy the expectations generated by the "musical." It has no large productions numbers, and Streisand is the only one who sings. Considering her reputation as a "screen hog" and an "egomaniac," Streisand's decision to limit the singing to Yentl naturally disturbed audiences who expected to see her singing with and to others—not just singing directly to the audience alone. Of course, in the traditional movie musical, the heroes' and heroines' willingness to sing to other characters in the film places a considerable amount of the burden of response on those other characters—thus film-goers do not necessarily have to respond alone, or feel overburdened by a character's emotions. In *Yentl,* however, all the songs serve only as the soliloquies of a single character, a artistic choice that is bound to create some discomfort.

First, the audience is entirely complicit in Yentl's disguise. *Alone* in that complicity, they are forced to identify with Yentl in a way they do not with other disguised characters like *Tootsie's* Michael Dorsey or the heroine of *Victor/Victoria,* who both have accomplices with whom they interact in their real gender identities. Then when Yentl sings a number of deeply revealing songs, the distance between character and audience becomes even slighter. In short, the audience is asked to understand and identify not only with her pain and alienation, but with her sexual confusion. Understandably, this is a lot to ask from audiences, most of whom are unwilling to even contemplate in themselves what are considered tabooed and perverted impulses. And so Yentl's singing bothers them; it is "too much."

The most disturbing subversion, the one demanding even more from audiences than Yentl's musical soliloquies, however, is the subversion of the cross-dressing genre. When we see Yentl cutting her hair and putting on men's clothing, we add to our other expectations a whole new set of demands generated by such films as *Some Like it Hot, Tootsie,* and *Victor/Victoria.* In strict compliance with the conventions of this genre, its protagonists adopt their sexual disguises out of economic necessity. If their characters question the appropriateness of sex roles and gender identities, they do so only because their disguise

Anshel meets Avigdor at the yeshiva

has forced them into situations where they realize what life is like for the opposite sex. And even then, they never question their own sexual identity, nor do their stints as members of the opposite sex generate psychological repercussions that continue once they remove their disguise. The genre does create proliferating sexual confusions as it undermines the male/female opposition on which rests so much of our psychological and social lives, and gives us characters who are neither strictly male nor female, but an amalgam of both. Without this differentiation, "sexual integrity disappears and chaos impends."[2]

This "chaos" has familiar contours. Tricked by the disguise, men and woman fall in love with members of their own sex. Because we are in on the deception, we are titillated by the prospect that a woman is in love with a man who is actually a woman, or by the possibility that a character who is experiencing what we know to be a heterosexual attraction feels confused by what he/she believes are "homosexual" urges.

Thus the chaos provides us with a very powerful and potentially disruptive situation that calls into question and threatens to destroy conventional sexual configurations. But what makes this genre acceptable and no doubt accounts for its popularity is its demand that this "chaos" be dispelled in a thoroughly conservative conclusion in which disguises are removed and heterosexual pairs are bonded together. The social order, then, is called into question for the better part of the film only so that it can be completely reaffirmed by the ending.

Yentl's songs make it clear from the outset that while the film bears more than superficial similarities to this genre, ultimately it does not conform to its conventions. In her first song Yentl's question, "Where do I belong?" makes it clear that her disguise is born not of economic but psychological necessity in response to a society that has identified her ambitions and desires as "masculine," and therefore forbidden to her as a woman. Her songs also reveal that the characters she deceives are not alone in experiencing the sexual confusions brought about by the disguise: "No wonder he loves her," she muses as she watches the beautiful Hadass move around the dining room. As her confusion grows, the lyrics become more explicit; on the eve of her wedding to Hadass, she worries, "Am I a woman or a man?"

And in the most blatant subversion of all, *Yentl* refuses to reaffirm the social norms which would establish Yentl in a comfortably reassuring heterosexual union. Had *Yentl* followed genre conventions, we somehow would have had a minor character like Shim-

mele pulled in to marry Hadass so that Yentl could marry Avigdor. But at the end of the film, Yentl goes off alone. Once again the lyrics undermine any attempt we may make to pin Yentl down. She may be dressed as a woman, she may be "Yentl" once more, but she is not safely attached to a man. In fact, her final song suggests not devastation or disappointment over the absent male but rather just how flirtation with tabooed passions has become the source of power and delight, a way to find "the sweetest of pleasures." The only concession the lyrics make to any possible heterosexual reaffirmation is Yentl's one ambiguous question: "Where is the some*one* who will want to share/My every sweet imagined possibility" [emphasis added].

So, while *Yentl* teases audiences with the promise of several familiar genres, it simply does not fit into any one with which American audiences are familiar. Its heroine's psychological complexity as presented in and abetted by her musical soliloquies makes it difficult to classify as a genre film. In fact, its final refusal to reaffirm social norms challenges our "easy assumptions and presuppositions about life," making it a "mimetic" film; that is, a film that truly imitates the uncertainty and confusion of life without providing any reassurance of security or order.[3]

Certainly *Yentl* fits this description, especially when its resolution creates only more uncertainty: Yentl's destination, her ambiguous "new place," seems to be one in which the traditional man has no defined position.[4] Despite these mimetic features, however, *Yentl* is not a purely mimetic film because it is unwilling to sustain the explicit complexity of Yentl's confusion. It opts instead for a strange give and take—fluctuating between mimetic scenes that acknowledge sexual ambiguity as the motive for Yentl's behavior and generic scenes that completely deny and bury such motivations beneath a simplified, fairy-tale surface. Yentl tells Avigdor she dressed as a boy *only* because she wanted to study Talmud; she married Hadass only because she didn't want to lose him, because she loved him.

So what is Streisand up to? Is this peculiar, bothersome, impossible combination of formula and mimesis, this composite of genres—fairy tale/Streisand romance/musical/and cross-dressing comedy—the bumbling production of a novice screenwriter/director who bit off just a little more than she could chew—"Barbra's Folly"? Or is it possible that Streisand has created a brilliant and effective cinematic form perfectly suited to what must be recognized, given the strictures of popular culture, as its revolutionary content?

What precisely is this "revolutionary" content? And why has Streisand so downplayed it by insisting that *Yentl* is merely a "fairy tale," a simple love story that would appeal to anyone, a fatherless daughter's obsession with creating herself a "Papa"?

What *Yentl* suggests overtly in its mimetic moments and denies in its formulaic moments is an explosive and disturbing truth about female sexuality and the disruptive change in social organization such a truth demands. Because this truth is grounded in homoeroticism, Streisand cannot allow it mimetic license but must contain it through silence and indirection.

What little she does allow to come to the surface is apparently so threatening that critics and audiences refuse, for the most part, even to see it. Those who do admit that Yentl is sexually attracted to Hadass will not say that her attraction is "homosexual." Such critical squeamishness reflects our culture's penchant for assigning value to sexual preference and its insistence that heterosexuality and homosexuality are mutually exclusive categories. The minute Yentl tells Avigdor she loves him and married Hadass only for him, we immediately restore her to complete heterosexual status and gratefully forget her steamy moments with Hadass. Despite our society's increased tolerance of homosexuality (current "moral majority" politics notwithstanding), we are nowhere near ready to admit that homosexuality is anything more than a perversion to be tolerated—certainly not a component of "normal" heterosexuality.

Ironically, we fail to see that our society's family structure not only accounts for but facilitates this component. In their studies of female-dominated infant care, feminist psychoanalytic theorists reject Freud's notion that female sexual identity is based on penis envy. In the most insightful and revisionary moment in feminist psychoanalysis, they suggest that a girl formalizes her sense of female-

ness in continuity with her mother, her primary love object. While the boy must deny this attachment and identification if he is to create a male self, female identity is created in relation to and ongoing identification with the mother. Thus is established the paradigm of male and female identity and the basis of relationships to others. Female pursuit of relatedness and male pursuit of separateness suggest that men are *not* really suited to fulfilling women's emotional needs. Nancy Chodorow says that women have babies in order to fill this need, thereby replicating for themselves their relationships with their mother. But if other women are emotionally primary in women's lives, may not friendships and even eroticized friendships fill the need as efficiently? Dorothy Dinnerstein believes that this need makes the homoerotic far more powerful for the girl than the boy.

Yentl is the first popular film to display an awareness and acceptance of these complex and discomfiting ideas which grow naturally out of its plot. That they are explored with such emotional richness is the source of *Yentl*'s difference. Whether Streisand studied female psychology or simply trusted to what must be highly attuned instincts, she has embodied this content in a film whose form and structure are different—are "female."

For the homoerotic is an integral part of the film which Streisand is careful to present without ideological stridency. Avigdor's erotic feelings for Anshel are expressed the least subtly. As their friendship develops so does their physical closeness until it peaks when Avigdor flirtatiously wrestles Anshel to the ground and is clearly startled as he realizes the depth of his attraction. And yet his realization does not lead to homosexual panic. Instead, Avigdor tries to get the understandably timid Anshel to strip and join him in the water, promising to hold him and teach him how to swim. Streisand thus provides him with a metaphorical way of acting upon his sexual desire. Avigdor's feelings do, however, fit within genre conventions. We are not disturbed by his passion because we know it is really a heterosexual one.

Yentl's more complicated relationship with Hadass does *not* conform to genre conventions. And the very elements that keep it from doing so are what make it fascinating in light of Chodorow's and Dinnerstein's ideas. Because the homoerotic feeling between Yentl and Hadass is authentic, Streisand is less straightforward and consistent in presenting it. Avigdor can tell Yentl at the end of the film that he was frankly disturbed by his passion for Anshel—"I was afraid to touch you"—but we will not catch Yentl being so explicit about her feelings for Hadass. In fact, in one scene she verbally denies such feelings, telling us that Hadass is not all that distracting even as we see how flustered she is by Hadass's overt advances. But there is no denying the erotic tension in the dinner, parlor, and bedroom scenes between Anshel and Hadass. No denying that Hadass's questions—"Will you teach me?" and "How many children do you want?" are filled with pathos and yearning. And there is no denying that Yentl briefly succumbs to Hadass's seduction, allowing her lips to brush Hadass's before she breathlessly tells her she cannot go through with it. The sexual consummation this might have led to is displaced. Instead of a passionate kiss, or a homophobic retreat, Yentl falls toward Hadass, and in a moment of physical merger reminiscent of infant bliss, the two take turns as mother and child, comforting and being comforted. This scene is manifestly homoerotic and modelled upon the earliest homoerotic moment in a woman's life as identified by Chodorow and Dinnerstein—that with the mother.

But Yentl has no mother, and as if to underline this absence, Streisand has dedicated *Yentl* to her father ("and to all our fathers"). *Yentl* presents us with a contingency that neither Chodorow nor Dinnerstein really probes. In concerning themselves only with traditional family structures and focusing on the necessity of getting the man fully involved in infant and child care, they ignore the difference of father-raised women like Yentl. Yentl's close relationship with her father gives her a potency usually reserved for the male child—an access (albeit limited) to the male world. By lovingly providing her with his language, the scholar's language, her father initiates her into a world she would not know as a mother-raised daughter, and cannot possess even as a father-raised daughter.

As a father-raised woman, Yentl's difficulties do not end with the irony of her exclusion.

The strong link with her father suggests that Yentl's primary self may in fact be masculine. If this is so, then her main identity and gender task is to add a mother as a love object, an object that becomes powerfully eroticized in the way the father does when the mother is present. This explains Yentl's complicated relationship with Hadass. Although she may never reveal to Avigdor and Hadass anything more than that she "loves" Hadass and that she "finds [her] beautiful," she expresses the depth and complexity of her feelings when she sings:

> She's mother, she's sister
> She's lover.
> She's the wonder of wonders
> No man can deny.
> So why would he change her?
> She's loving—she's tender—
> She's woman—
> So am I.

The respect Yentl expresses here belies a greater concern with the traditionally "feminine" than the film's dedication or its heroine's avid pursuit of the male world would seem to allow. "What she's taught me isn't written anywhere," Yentl sings of Hadass, with reverent regard for the female world her books do not (cannot?) acknowledge. And so, Yentl develops a strong female identity and a willingness to drop her disguise to embrace this identity only through her homoerotic relationship with Hadass. Yet the female identity she creates for herself refuses to privilege either the traditionally "male" or traditionally "female"; and this female identity is not one with which we are very familiar, in life, fiction, or film. In *Reinventing Womanhood,* Carolyn Heilbrun noted how difficult it has been for fiction writers to "imagine a life in which a woman, without clothing herself in the character of a man, yet goes forth, full of hope and purpose, into a world that men have always dominated."[6] Streisand has imagined this for Yentl and has also created a "female" form appropriate for such a character's story.

Because of its continual language play and its repetitions of scenes, gestures, objects, camera angles, and phrases, *Yentl* proceeds almost entirely through self-conscious artifice that makes it feel completely different from other popular films with feminist messages. This form imitates what many literary critics have described as female language and strategy. Excluded from the male-dominated arenas of social and economic power, women must often live by their wits; what power they do manage to accrue—a power wholly different from that which men understand—is acquired through what Elaine Showalter characterizes as "silence, euphemism, [and] circumlocution."[7]

There is no better description of the "language" Streisand has created. *Yentl* is one verbal evasion after another, a beautifully composed work of indirection, double entendre, understatement, ambiguity, and well-intentioned falsehood that twists and turns until Yentl's final moments with Avigdor and Hadass, where pure love is finally expressed with an unexpected openness. Until these moments, however, Streisand's characters rarely respond to or interact with one another straightforwardly as they try to disentangle themselves from their mounting confusion.

Of course, Yentl is a master of circumlocution, and has to be. In the opening scenes, she uses humor to evade the questions of those who want her to get married. As the surrounding women laugh, she makes her escape. When she adopts her disguise, she is even more vigilant in subverting questions to avoid possible detection, answering questions with questions, or citing obscure passages from the Talmud. As Hadass's husband, Yentl displays the full range of her verbal virtuosity as she must ward off Hadass's attempts at seduction without hurting her or revealing her own sex. On their wedding night, Yentl puts her off by quoting the Talmud, informing her that it would be a sin to give herself to one man while still thinking of another. Because Avigdor is still on her mind, Hadass somewhat reluctantly accepts this, telling Anshel that he is a considerate man, and they drink to their friendship. The second time, Yentl redirects her wife toward the Talmud, engaging her in study, and then incessantly expounds, like Scheherezade, until Hadass falls asleep. The third time, Yentl's talent fails her, because of her own erotic feelings, and because her wife has developed a virtuosity of her own.

Streisand's repetitions of scenes, gestures, objects, and phrases are also part of a "female" art. So often does Streisand repeat a scene in a slightly different way or focus on certain

Hadass and Anshel: "steamy moments" in YENTL

objects—apples, fish, cookies, birds, books, mirrors—which she places centrally in scene after scene, that the narrative proceeds by connection and relation, the very characteristics Chodorow identifies as the particular strengths of the female psyche. Yentl tucks her father into bed and kisses his forehead exactly as she does later with Hadass. She sits at her father's feet as he muses about her future and later at Avigdor's as he muses about their possible future. Avigdor tells Anshel that "nothing is impossible" to persuade "him" to marry Hadass; Anshel yells the same phrase to keep Avigdor from leaving and to signal "his" willingness to marry Hadass; later still, Yentl uses it to remind Avigdor of her "sacrifice" in marrying Hadass and to point out his own limitations. Hadass's mother places her hand on her daughter's to comfort her, and later Hadass places her hand on Yentl's, thereby evoking her own mother and suggesting her role as "mother" to Yentl. But she has also fallen in love with Anshel and the moment is charged with her erotic longing.

Yentl also constantly looks at herself in mirrors, caresses books with reverence, and worships Hadass's culinary creations. The movie thus moves forward only by returning upon itself in a recursive series of lyrical repetitions. This highly self-conscious artifice fills the movie with magic objects and phrases that reverberate with accumulated meaning as they inevitably recall and transform their earlier appearances.

It is impossible to say that the genre subversions, the feminist content, and these stylistic techniques are the differences Pauline Kael referred to when she said *Yentl* was "simply different from films made by men." But we can be certain that whatever these differences are, they have been met with critical ambivalence and downright hostility, and they may explain the Motion Picture Academy's negligence in failing to acknowledge Streisand with even a single Oscar nomination. What is the future for female film-makers whose vision and concerns are female, whose work does not conform to male expectations, and who must survive in an industry still dominated by men, and in a culture that has yet to give women their deserved recognition as serious artists?

Years ago, Pauline Kael observed that Streisand "conceals nothing," but is "fiercely, almost frighteningly direct." When she marshals all of her "red hot talent . . . there is an element of possible unpleasantness, of threat . . . which produces unresolved feelings in us."[8] Kael has her finger on our culture's

pulse, but does not really tell us what her reading indicates. Nor does she anticipate Streisand's taking such total control of a film. In a fully industrialized society which is becoming increasingly atomized, we prefer the specialist and the expert and tend to superciliously distrust and denigrate what we would have once revered as the Renaissance (wo)man. In a society whose economy cannot accommodate hordes of women and minorities demanding jobs, whose mores cannot readily accommodate sexual "deviancy," and whose precarious truce between the sexes cannot accommodate woman's independence and selfhood, we prefer in our fantasy worlds to return to a time when woman was not nearly as large, capable, forgiving, and complete as Streisand creates her in *Yentl*. And we hardly know what to make of a heroine who accomplishes her own liberation without having to distrust or betray other women and without fearing to extend a hand to any who are willing to follow her.

—ALLISON FERNLEY
AND PAULA MALOOF

NOTES

1. Pauline Kael, "The Perfectionist," *The New Yorker,* 28 Nov. 1983, pp. 109–110.

2. Coppelia Kahn, *Man's Estate: Masculine Identity in Shakespeare* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981), p. 209. Our discussion of the conventions of this genre closely follows Kahn's discussion of Shakespeare's sexual-identity comedies.

3. John G. Cawelti, *Adventure, Mystery and Romance: Formula Stories as Art and Popular Culture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976), pp. 1–36.

4. If a film "heroine" willfully leaving her man does not seem particularly revolutionary, it is because several recent mimetic films have ended with such a choice: *An Unmarried Woman, Private Benjamin,* and *The French Lieutenant's Woman.* These films, however, have been extremely careful to provide unquestionable motives for the choice: adulterous liaisons and philandering husbands. In *An Unmarried Woman,* Jill Clayburgh does not necessarily "leave" Alan Bates as much as stave off his invitation to spend the summer with him because she is not quite ready to make a commitment. But in none of these films does that choice powerfully question the desirability of the traditional man and the appropriateness of traditional heterosexual unions. Like Yentl, Clayburgh's character is offered a future with an undeniably attractive and "sensitive" man. But she does not forego this opportunity for anything as vague as "more," nor has she been married to a woman for one-third of the film.

5. For the complete arguments of feminist psychoanalysis, see Nancy Chodorow, *The Reproduction of Mothering: Psychoanalysis and the Sociology of Gender* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978), and Dorothy Dinnerstein, *The Mermaid and the Minotaur: Sexual Arrangements and Human Malaise* (New York: Harper and Row, 1976).

6. Carolyn G. Heilbrun, *Reinventing Womanhood* (New York: Norton, 1979), p. 92.

7. Elaine Showalter, "Feminist Criticism in the Wilderness," in Elizabeth Abel, ed., *Writing and Sexual Difference* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), pp. 21–23.

8. Pauline Kael, *Deeper Into Movies* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1973), p. 432.

DIARY FOR MY CHILDREN

Director: Márta Mészáros. Script: Mészáros. Photography: Miklós Jancsó, Jr. Music: Zsolt Döme. New Yorker Films.

Márta Mészáros, in her latest film, undertakes the impressively ambitious and moving project of telling the story of her generation in Hungary. But along with the large political tragedy she wishes to record for the young, Mészáros also tells a poignant personal story —of a young girl who loves movies, of a difficult female adolescence. We watch young Juli's primping in front of mirrors, her first love, her intellectual and paternal mentors, and—most affecting of all—her memories of her parents and of her loss of them in early childhood. Juli's traumatic orphaning is Mészáros's own, and there could be no more haunting an intertwining of personal and political than this from Mészáros's own early life. Perhaps it is just as well that Mészáros waited decades, through no less than thirteen feature films, and many more documentaries before that, before she dealt directly, on screen, with this searing material. *Diary* is her most demanding film yet, and she shows herself more than equal to what she asks of herself.

The first film of a planned trilogy, *Diary For My Children* takes fourteen-year-old Juli (played by Zsuzsa Czinkóczi, who was the little girl in Mészáros's *Women*) back to her native Hungary in 1947, from Russia where she had been living. She is accompanied by her ill and beloved "grandfather" Deszo (Pál Zolnay), who is not a blood relation, and "grandmother," and the three live with Deszo's sister Magda (Anna Polony), an important figure in the Communist Party. The film takes Juli through to 1953, harsh Stalinist years in Hungary. As we watch the growing oppressiveness of the handsome, highly intelligent Magda, it's clear we are also watching the darkening of a time. Magda, at first editor of the Party newspaper, takes a new,

pulse, but does not really tell us what her reading indicates. Nor does she anticipate Streisand's taking such total control of a film. In a fully industrialized society which is becoming increasingly atomized, we prefer the specialist and the expert and tend to superciliously distrust and denigrate what we would have once revered as the Renaissance (wo)man. In a society whose economy cannot accommodate hordes of women and minorities demanding jobs, whose mores cannot readily accommodate sexual "deviancy," and whose precarious truce between the sexes cannot accommodate woman's independence and selfhood, we prefer in our fantasy worlds to return to a time when woman was not nearly as large, capable, forgiving, and complete as Streisand creates her in *Yentl*. And we hardly know what to make of a heroine who accomplishes her own liberation without having to distrust or betray other women and without fearing to extend a hand to any who are willing to follow her.

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more powerful and more sinister position as governor of a prison (against Deszo's fervent objections), and in her boots and military uniform grows increasingly harsh and inhuman. Grandfather Deszo and also Janos (played by Jan Nowicki), the most sympathetic figures in the film—both older men loved by young Juli, and both themselves associated with Communism from their youth—speak to Juli with respect for Magda. Janos remembers the young girl full of brains and spirit he loved and almost married long ago; Deszo tells Juli about the strength that permitted Magda to survive all sorts of hardships and to fight on. But theirs is a respect mixed with fear, and even—in the case of her own brother—revulsion.

At the same time, the film avoids any reduction of the Communist leadership to a single monolithic type; it shows us a number of different faces of communism, ranging from such careerist bureaucratic hacks as the ugly father of one of Juli's school friends, to a brutal workingclass functionary, to once idealistic intellectuals now rigidified into inhumanity after years of struggle, like Magda—or wistfully disillusioned and still deeply humane, like Janos and Deszo. Deszo's horror over Magda is the more interesting because he was in on the very beginnings of Hungarian Communism, his illness dating back to his participation in the shortlived 1919 revolution under Bela Kun, which was quickly routed, with horrible massacres and mass exodus in its wake. The second Communist regime in Hungary, from 1948 to 1956 (the time span of Mészáros's planned trilogy), saw an eight-year reign of terror under the absolute rule of the Moscow-trained leader Matyas Rákosi, during which Communists were as fiercely punished as non-Communists, and the Hungarian wartime Communist leader Rajk was among the executed (alluded to in one of the political speeches from actual newsreel footage beautifully interwoven throughout the film). The 1956 uprising, which was Hungary's response to Khrushchev's denunciation of Stalin, brought into power the current benign long-time regime of János Kádár, which has allowed such a rich flowering of Hungarian films as the work being discussed here.

But *Diary* ends with the early fifties, and

DIARY FOR MY CHILDREN

not only concludes with the enormously appealing Janos put in prison, but has the young Juli living in a kind of prison with Magda, as well as continually at war with her. When Juli comes to the actual prison that Magda supervises, the guard who unlocks and locks the doors salutes her, in stunning Newspeak, with "Freedom's Greeting." Juli's conflict with Magda has to do not only with Magda's wanting to adopt Juli and to erase the fact of Juli's parents, but also because Magda is, in her essence, at war with artists like Juli's father. Mészáros, when she speaks of the murder of her own father, the sculptor Laszlo Mészáros, in the Stalin death camps in Russia in 1938, keeps returning to people saying he was a person who wouldn't toe anyone's line, who said what he felt. Her own work is clearly drawn to just the kind of independent individuated spirits who were most quickly ground up in the Stalinist murder machinery. As for her own political involvement, when I interviewed her this past fall, she argued that *Diary* was nothing new for her, no more political than earlier films like *9 Months* were, in their own way. But at the same time, she said, "Instinctively I loathe and hate politics. I consider a priori all [political] systems a fundamental lie and a struggle for power." Those most loved in Mészáros's films are the deviant

ones, like the heroines Lili Monori plays in *9 Months* and *Women*—those who are, like Janos here, people who are different, who have special reserves of their own, however hard they may work for the collective good—maybe drinking too much in order to be able to live with what they must.

Jan Nowicki, who plays the major male character in *Diary,* has starred repeatedly in Mészáros's films—as the factory foreman who wants to marry the Juli of *9 Months,* as the charming drunken husband of the Juli of *Women* (these are all quite different characters though all named Janos and Juli). But Nowicki has never been more affecting than in his double role here (an obviously meaningful doubleness on various levels) as the bearded Janos and also as Juli's clean-shaven sculptor father, returned to life in the girl's memory flashbacks. We're long accustomed to male directors loving their actresses with the camera, and it's touching to see a woman director do likewise. Nowicki makes Janos a large figure, another who has suffered for his socialist ideals, and who continues to work round the clock at his plant as an act of service, though clearly a long way from his early idealistic commitment. He has a particularly powerful scene recalling his various hairbreadth escapes from death when all around him died, including his wife and child, and says he has to live, in place of the others; because of them he can't give up. There is a fearful weight, on him and on the film, of historical tragedy, of living with political extremes, as we here live with psychological extremes. But the experience of being thrown into the whirlwinds of history, of public cataclysms—that is not familiar to us, though it is the very ground of this work, as the dead are a constant presence in Juli's room, in Janos's house, in photos of mother and daughter looking out at us all the time, with the man and girl brought together by, among other things, their losses.

But though Juli loves Janos, and though she herself bears the severest wounds from history, she also has the cockiness—the shallow arrogance—of youth. She can still reproach Janos for his caution—cowardice in her eyes—he who has managed to survive in a world that is one continual minefield. In contrast to such strongly women-oriented Mészáros films as *9 Months* and *Women,* this film invests the men with all the wisdom and humanity; it has as its most painful theme the yearning for a father, and has its two women characters relate as combatants only. Still, *Diary* at the same time gives us a remarkably independent, strongwilled heroine. Juli is even duplicitous, from the start, despite an innocently blank freckled face—stealing movie passes, lifting a phone to stop the ringing, not to speak of some startlingly sharp-edged responses to Magda, abrasive moments of truth, that indicate a self-possession and strength of will equal to Magda's own. She reminds one of the headstrong young girl Juliane in Margaretha von Trotta's *Marianne and Juliane.* This film has a note of bleakness, of sadness, absent from other Mészáros films because they are so concerned with the empowering struggles of women who—whatever the ambiguities of their fates—grow in the course of each film. But this film at the same time contributes a notably strong figure to the growing ranks of important filmic explorations of adolescent girls moving toward womanhood.

Juli, like Juliane, is rebellious, and her rebelliousness largely takes the form of continual movie-going. The film works very skillfully with images of movies, from an exaggerated folksy family shot at sentimental low angle in a sunlit forest (vulgar cartoon of Juli's own idealized childhood memories); to footage of forties fashion shows; to various political rallies and other political events of the time; to the final grotesque clip representing a socialist-realist vision of art as uplifting. In that final old film segment, near the conclusion of *Diary,* a serious composer with an intellectual face, played as a clown, is severely reprimanded because his work does not cheer up the workers. His bland-looking taskmaster proceeds to lead a mass of undifferentiated smiling faces in what appears to be a hymn to socialism. There is a devastating contrast between this film insert and the final sequence that follows it, of Juli and Janos's son finally getting to visit Janos in prison, he hazy between layers of wire barrier, this vivid man who could never be merged in a faceless mass of uplift. As Juli says to him, in the last words

of the film: "Janos, you've gone grey." Still, Mészáros promises that this is by no means the end of Janos, who in the next two films of the trilogy will come out of prison and back into active life, even if to be imprisoned again.

While the second film will mix black-and-white and color, and the third be entirely in color, this film is shot in beautiful black-and-white, as many of Mészáros's films have been, though here clearly to contribute to the late-forties, early-fifties atmosphere, and to make intercutting with old footage easier. It also allows Mészáros to produce quietly radiant images. Obviously this film does not have the resources or the technical brilliance of *Zelig* but—and I say this as a serious admirer of Woody Allen—it has an infinitely more meaningful statement to make, politically and humanly.

Though the film works very well with politics, its richest and strongest moments are in my view personal. From the early sequences of the girl's return to Hungary and her remembrance of her mother holding her hand as a child, to the final glowing slow-motion memory image of her father raising her above his head, just before Janos (in present time) is removed to prison, the film gives us—through the idealized vision of the child's eyes—a series of deeply affecting flashbacks: images of Juli's parents embracing in a lake counterposed to bleak, chill, snowy landscapes of the present; the little girl Juli awkwardly waiting for her mother through a childbirth and joining in her mother's screams; or watching through a window (in both her present self and her little girl self at once) as her father works the stone; watching him cover a clay bust with a wet cloth to keep it moist as the soldiers take him away; or, most plaintive of all, Juli's voice crying "Father" through the vast white stoniness of a quarry that seems of a limitless depth and vacancy. To have had such an early childhood experience, and to survive it and create beyond that painfulness, needs a valiant and strong spirit and clearly Mészáros has one. She has made a rending and marvellous work of art out of this tragedy.

On one level the film is a portrait of the artist as a young girl, a growing but still underpopulated genre, given the small number of

DIARY FOR MY CHILDREN

women film-makers able to make "art" feature films. Mészáros intends that the second part of the trilogy will concern Juli's education as a film-maker, and that in the third part Juli will be a fully grown woman making her own films. Juli's hunger for the screen in *Diary* is an affecting foreshadowing of that, as well as it is a hunger for the information about the world that films can provide—the mysteriously destructive world she has experienced without being able to understand. There are also memorable moments of the young girl practicing for womanhood by miming a gesture of Greta Garbo's in her constant film-watching, or vulgarly putting on make-up in imitation of a cheap magazine cover girl. Mészáros gives Juli a gentle, awkward boyfriend who tells her he loves her and whom she can fully share her painful story with. A girl with her own special mix of vulnerability, stubborn wilfullness, and courage, she moves through the usual adolescent turbulences at the same time as she swims willy-nilly in waters of history so deep and dark they would take anybody a full lifetime to sort out, to undo the damage of. But the human spirit doesn't drown in Márta Mészáros's work. Her films gain in strength all the time. And if *Diary For My Children* is a fair guide to what is to follow, this trilogy will crown her already impressive achievement.

—BARBARA KOENIG QUART

MEMORIAS DE CARCERE

Written and directed by Nelson Pereira dos Santos, based on the autobiographical work by Graciliano Ramos. Photography: Jose Medeiros and Antonio Luiz Soares. Produced by L. C. Barreto/Regina Filmes/Embrafilm.

In *Memorias do Cárcere,* Nelson Pereira dos Santos has synthesized a life's work creating an authentically popular cinema. With passion, pain and remarkable good humor, the film explores the implications of a statement by Graciliano Ramos, whose memoirs it draws on: "Nobody enjoys total freedom. We begin oppressed by syntax and we end up with the political police: but in the narrow limits allowed by grammar and law, we can move about."

Majestic at a three-hour length appropriate to a story that involves some 100 characters, the film recounts the year that Ramos spent in prison, in 1936–1937. He had been an open supporter of a popular left-coalition party. Once it was banned, a smaller sectarian group dominated by Communist Party members attempted a coup. The government seized the opportunity not only to put down the coup but to sweep the dissident slate clean. Ramos, a public education official, an atheist, and a popular social-realist novelist—though never a partisan—was a prime target.

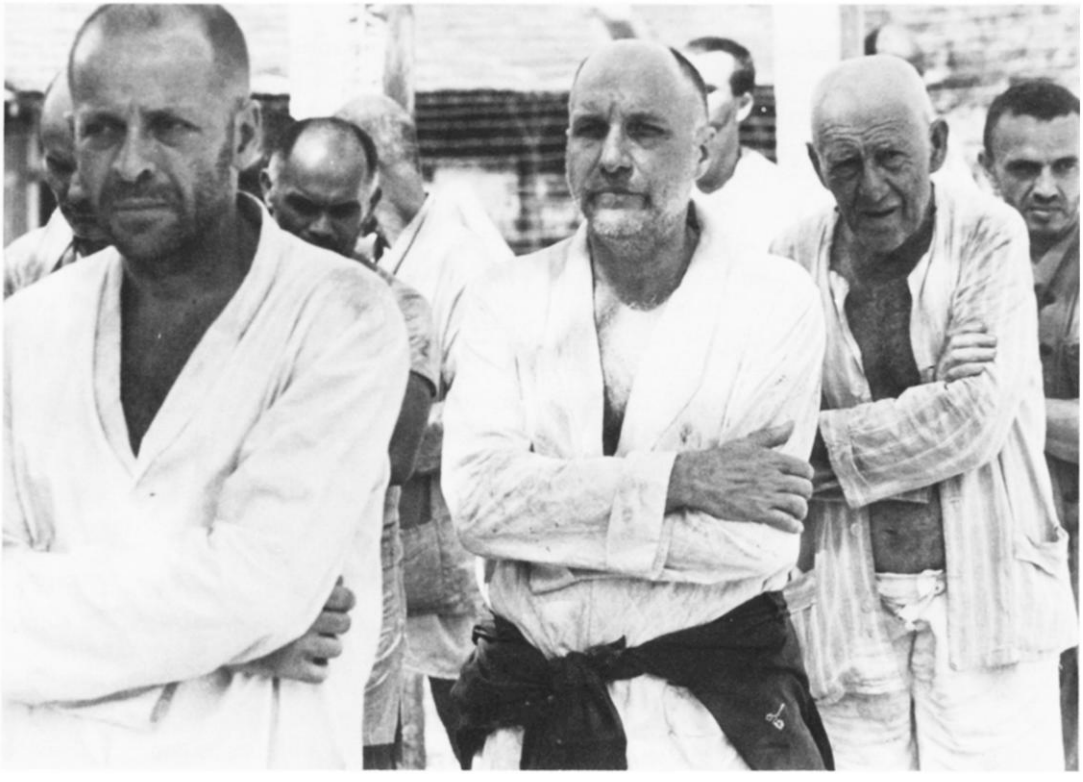
The film follows Ramos from his arrest to a steamer voyage transporting him to prison, through his adaptation to prison life and success in smuggling out his writing with his wife's help, to his transfer to an isolated penal colony. There, where lush tropical surroundings belie the rigors of what is really a death camp, in a world where political prisoners mingle with violent criminals, he keeps his sanity and distracts himself from his declining health by passionately scribbling his observations. As he writes, fellow-inmates come to regard him as their little chance at immortality. He becomes the quixotic, often irascible soul of their living history. On the verge of his release, inmates of all political persuasions and social backgrounds band together in an attempt—successful or not, the film leaves to our imagination—to preserve his manuscript from censors.

Pereira dos Santos, who is sometimes called "the father of modern Brazilian cinema," has had a long relationship with the work of Graciliano Ramos. It was Ramos's spare novel *Barren Lives* that provided Pereira dos Santos with the backbone for his 1963 film of the same name. The film-maker also once embarked on a project to film *São Bernardo,* another Ramos classic, abandoning it only when differences emerged between him and Ramos over the adaptation. His respect for Ramos, he told me while at the 1984 New York Film Festival (where *Memorias* was shown), was such that he did not want to argue with the great man.

"Ramos," he says, "is my master. What he did in print with Brazilian culture I would like to do in film." The *cinema novo* movement, the Brazilian "new wave" of the sixties, bore strong influence from writers such as Ramos, Jorge Amado (whose novel *Tent of Miracles* was the basis for a 1977 Pereira dos Santos film), and José Lins de Rego. This generation of social-realist authors found both a political and an aesthetic mission in the recuperation and examination of Brazilian popular culture.

This was the mission that Pereira dos Santos set for himself in film. From his first feature, *Rio 40°* (1955), a neorealist documentary filmed in slums, the film-maker has been experimenting with ways to create, as he put it in 1977, "a cinema nourished by popular roots, to liberate the people." During the heyday of *cinema novo,* he explored ways to both express and critique popular culture, to both engage and provoke audiences.

"Our films became increasingly hermetic, however," he says at this distance. "And I began searching for a more anthropological approach, not the kind of sociological thesis I had begun with." The film *How Tasty Was My Little Frenchman* (1971) was the beginning of a kind of film-making that Pereira dos Santos was to call "talking with the public," an approach that honors the storytelling conventions of mainstream film while capturing the vitality of popular expression. His *Amulet of Ogum* (1974) was about the underworld of black spiritualism; *Tent of Miracles* (1977) put the forbidden subject of racial discrimination at the core of a comic drama; and *Estrada da Vida* (1980) celebrated the populist energy and humor of two country-music musicians. All were stylistically distinctive. All were box-office successes, but generated critical con-



MEMORIAS DE CARCERE

troversy, with some arguing that Pereira dos Santos had lost his left-critical edge. To this kind of criticism, the film-maker offers a mild-mannered but efficient response: "It would be a shame to see reality only as we wish to see it." He argues, in fact, that "the intellectual in Brazil is a prisoner," enchained by his inability to participate without snobbishness in Brazil's popular culture. "I see this in myself," he says soberly.

It was with this background and perspective that Pereira dos Santos undertook the massive task of translating Graciliano Ramos's memoirs. The memoirs, which Ramos wrote a decade later—his notes in fact were destroyed in prison—run to several volumes. Among the minority of Brazilians who can read, it is a classic, not only kept on bookshelves but actually read. This is in part because the subject matter is at the center of the epoch's history, but also because Ramos was a wry, witty, self-knowing and compassionate writer whose art surfaces in a deceptive simplicity of style. It took Pereira dos Santos two and a half years to shape the project, in part because he wanted a film version as complete and as faithful as possible to the book, and in part because he was in awe of the task of translating the national classic onto the screen.

The result shares with Ramos's work a deceptive simplicity, and creates a drama that grants a human-sized grandeur to the experience of imprisonment.

Politics is at the core and on the surface of the film, but never in a programmatic or didactic sense. The history of this politically fraught moment—and the film documents the period meticulously, down to topical jokes in popular songs—reveals more than political opinions. It reveals social attitudes, options and relationships. It is this possibility that Pereira dos Santos saw when he told a colleague enthusiastically at the start of the project, "It is all here! *Memorias* is a metaphor for the Brazilian reality."

The key to revealing that reality is in establishing the position of the key character, Ramos. If he is not quite the hero of his own story, neither is he the villain, or the victim. In the film as in the book, he is a participant-observer, his perch on the petit-bourgeois professional rung of the social ladder at a

slight distance from conflict, his artist's alienation making possible a delight in the variety of human expression around him. Friendly but never part of any faction, he knows that his mission is not to act but to record. Unconcerned with creature comfort, even revolted by the constant requirement to eat in order to subsist, he seems to live on curiosity. Even when people offend him, he turns the incident into data.

As Ramos, veteran actor Carlos Vereza meets an arduous challenge—a physical one that cost him a dramatic weight loss in midshoot for the penal colony scenes, and a psychological one that required him to create a vivid but not dominating character, one who emerges through others. He makes Ramos an acute observer, sometimes grumpy, sometimes harassed, embarrassed most of all by his own emotions (especially when dealing with his jealous, passionate and utterly unintellectual wife). He becomes someone it is easy to imagine telling your story to.

The camera maintains as discreet a distance from Ramos as Ramos does from the heat of social engagement. It sees Ramos's world, often from slightly behind his shoulder, and it frames him accurately in relationship to the group—whether a group of prisoners on their bunks, demonstrators flooding the prison's central square, or a vista of men spread out on pallets on the packed earth. When Ramos wins the solitude he sometimes craves, it is not he but the expanse of quiet that the camera yields up.

This is not an action film, but it never lags or begs for intermission. Partly that is because the pace is nicely broken in the middle, by a series of swiftly edited sequences condensing the later part of his stay in prison. But mostly it is because the film finds action not in events but in the relationships men create, and the ways in which they reveal their own social formation as they do so. This is the ultimate legacy of neorealism in Pereira dos Santos's work—the recreation in art of the social relationships at the core of culture. This understanding makes possible a film about the experiences of one man that is in fact about a whole society.

Through Ramos's struggle to endure through exercise of art, it is possible to see a panoply of ways that people struggle to own their own lives. The threat that prison poses is as much to the human spirit as it is to the physical body. The deaths that mark the film are no more significant than the moments of despair and even petulance that can be a symptom of despair.

The film offers an x-ray of the social and political types caught in this repressive sweep. Class and race distinctions flourish in prison as much as out of it. The leader of the major left party (played by longtime Pereira dos Santos character actor Nildo Parente), for instance, arrives on board the steamer with his black valet, and does not scruple to order a first-class dinner delivered from luxury quarters to his bunk in the hold. There are as many political passions and dogmas as there are prisoners. A tough-talking working-class detainee climaxes a political rap with the battle cry: "When the revolution comes, all atheists will be shot!" Atheist Ramos takes careful notes. In prison, while a foreigner teaches basic principles of Marxism in his native Spanish, a raucous anarchist stands on a balcony, crowing like a rooster whenever he hears a phrase that smacks to him of ideological rhetoric. While the film points up the weaknesses and limits of all political tendencies with gentle irony, it is most openly critical toward the leftist military men who played a large role in the failed coup and who would later play leading roles in political history. They have the intolerance and the smug group behavior of middle-echelon military men everywhere, and their political convictions merge all too comfortably with their personal political ambitions.

More than a survey of social types, the film is also a revelation of the power of art, and a comment on the peculiar social position of the modern artist. Near the end of the film, Ramos is asked by a guard, who admires his skill and reputation, to write a speech the guard must deliver at a birthday party honoring a high official. Ramos appears nonplussed by the request, and then he quietly describes to the guard the meaning of writing. He asks the guard to consider Ramos's position, and to realize that his work is only good so far as it is true, an honest communication. He suggests that, however humble, the guard's own sentiments will work better than anything he can write. The encounter becomes a lesson

in what makes art work; Ramos has explained why his expression cannot be divorced from his social position. The guard must acknowledge the truth of his relationship with Ramos. Far from becoming angry at Ramos's rejection, the guard soberly accepts the greater gift: that Ramos has taken him seriously. That small moment expresses in miniature a theme of the entire film. Ramos's writing establishes a vital relationship with all those around him, one in which he not only records but asserts the humanity of people fighting the dehumanizing label of "prisoner." The final scene then becomes a cathartic culmination of that theme.

Memorias do Cárcere has had a remarkable reception in Brazil across all political lines, and it also garnered a critics prize at Cannes in 1984. Its universal success testifies to the way it transcends its location in prison, and its social and historical content, precisely by its firm anchoring in that context. Like the best among the neorealists, Pereira dos Santos finds the universal in the particular. The film is "about" prison, and Brazil, and politics. But more than that, it is about the desire for and the exercise of liberty in a never completely free society. It fulfills the objective that Pereira dos Santos set for himself: "I want to convey, as was Graciliano's wish, the feeling of freedom, the desire to leave jail, forever, never to return. Of course, I mean jail in the wider sense, the jail of social and political conventions that still repress the Brazilian people."

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Short Notices

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and complicated personalities, and are drawn with such painstaking naturalism that their flesh wrinkles when they lift their legs. Even less conventionally, this is probably the first "cartoon" to evoke tears and catharsis; the story is an inexorable tragedy. Two dogs (one brain-damaged, the other a gruff misanthrope) escape from a North England vivisection lab and attempt to live in the wild, but their contact with man, however brutal, has made them incompetent to fend for themselves. Neither cute nor wise, they are hunted first as sheep-killers, then as rumored plague-carriers. Reversing the usual procedure, writer-director Martin Rosen junked the spurious "happy ending" of the Richard Adams novel on which the film is based, substituting the touching conclusion demanded by the logic of the story. The tears stem from the tale, the catharsis from the film's rock-solid poetic structure. A single metaphor, in superlative full animation, is developed throughout the length of the movie: the opening shot is of a laboratory tank, the dogs travel through the streaming wetlands of the Lake Country, and the journey concludes at the North Sea. An equally rigorous structure informs the sound track; this is one film that keeps working until the final fade to black. The background music is unmanipulatively sparse, allowing the expressive voices of John Hurt and Christopher Benjamin to fully dominate the track. The opening credits, however, are accompanied by a poignant *a capella* blues (by Alan Price) which develops, over the end-credits, into a full gospel chorus—individual suffering transformed to a shared, despairing hopefulness. It's not just dogs who lead a dog's life.

Unfortunately, audiences remain conditioned by the Disney Syndrome. *The Plague Dogs* ran briefly in London and on the West Coast, opening to great reviews, few takers. The distributor, Avco/Embassy, abruptly lost enthusiasm, and Rosen volunteered to buy the film back. No other major distributor materialized, and Rosen, at work on several new projects, has for the time being taken the film out of circulation. —NAOMI WISE

Seeing Red. This lively, rich political documentary explores the effects of the postwar "Red Scare" on the lives of American Communists. Simultaneously, by implicitly exposing the propaganda techniques (traditionally right-wing in content) of the American mass media, *Seeing Red* is an act against future McCarthyism. The first several minutes of the movie are packed with data not only about the film's subject, but also about the stance of the film-makers, Julia Reichert and James Klein. The opening Eisensteinian historical montage actively involves the viewer in determining the meanings of the juxtaposed images; then, a contemporary sequence finds Reichert on the telephone, trying to set up an interview with some still-frightened ex-Red. When we later hear the disembodied "documentary narration" voiceover, we recognize the voice as Reichert's, not God's.

In this context, the opening montage implies a leftist sensibility, while the revealed presence of the film-maker implies a nonauthoritarian, anti-Stalinist viewpoint. By contrast, the historic "scenes from the Left" (some accompanied by rousing Red anthems or Depression-era pop, others by inflammatory newsreel narration) show an ironic disparity between what newsreels show and what they say they are showing. Unlike Reichert, the Voice of America dares not reveal its face.

The aging present and former Communists interviewed here prove engaging characters—witty, vivid, amusingly profane. When probed about the contradiction between their democratic ideals and Stalinist totalitarianism, they confess to an honest but guiltless agony; the postwar witch-hunts had far less effect on their loyalties than did Khrushchev's relevations of the horrors of Stalin's regime, which caused a mass defection from the Party. The passionate truthfulness of these old Reds appears in sharp relief against clips of the coolly opportunistic Cold Warriors (Truman, Nixon, Humphrey, et al.) who talked very clean and played very dirty.

The interview subjects do seem to have been selected for wit and sheer niceness, and one can't help but wish that more pointed questions had been asked of those who remain Party members today; nonetheless, the film-makers' attitude seems personally sympathetic but politically objective. Reichert and Klein have come to explore their subject, not to praise (or scold), and can scarcely be blamed for discovering that the Party was made of human beings, rather than horned monsters.

—NAOMI WISE

Books

STEINBECK AND FILM

By Joseph R. Millichap. New York: Ungar, 1983. $6.95 paperback, $12.95 hardcover.

In this interesting study of failure, Joseph Millichap has resisted the enthusiast's urge to rationalize Steinbeck's incapacity to produce a single "great" film around the clichés of directors or studios abusing a literary genius. Millichap is as critical of Steinbeck's writing as of the films it inspired, and his sober, steady academic approach neither vilifies nor glorifies the man who won a Nobel Prize for literature in 1962.

What interests Millichap is how film influenced Steinbeck's literary work and, quite specifically, how the documentary impulse of the thirties inspired Steinbeck to say of his own creativity, "I wanted to be merely a re-

and complicated personalities, and are drawn with such painstaking naturalism that their flesh wrinkles when they lift their legs. Even less conventionally, this is probably the first "cartoon" to evoke tears and catharsis; the story is an inexorable tragedy. Two dogs (one brain-damaged, the other a gruff misanthrope) escape from a North England vivisection lab and attempt to live in the wild, but their contact with man, however brutal, has made them incompetent to fend for themselves. Neither cute nor wise, they are hunted first as sheep-killers, then as rumored plague-carriers. Reversing the usual procedure, writer-director Martin Rosen junked the spurious "happy ending" of the Richard Adams novel on which the film is based, substituting the touching conclusion demanded by the logic of the story. The tears stem from the tale, the catharsis from the film's rock-solid poetic structure. A single metaphor, in superlative full animation, is developed throughout the length of the movie: the opening shot is of a laboratory tank, the dogs travel through the streaming wetlands of the Lake Country, and the journey concludes at the North Sea. An equally rigorous structure informs the sound track; this is one film that keeps working until the final fade to black. The background music is unmanipulatively sparse, allowing the expressive voices of John Hurt and Christopher Benjamin to fully dominate the track. The opening credits, however, are accompanied by a poignant *a capella* blues (by Alan Price) which develops, over the end-credits, into a full gospel chorus—individual suffering transformed to a shared, despairing hopefulness. It's not just dogs who lead a dog's life.

Unfortunately, audiences remain conditioned by the Disney Syndrome. *The Plague Dogs* ran briefly in London and on the West Coast, opening to great reviews, few takers. The distributor, Avco/Embassy, abruptly lost enthusiasm, and Rosen volunteered to buy the film back. No other major distributor materialized, and Rosen, at work on several new projects, has for the time being taken the film out of circulation. —NAOMI WISE

Seeing Red. This lively, rich political documentary explores the effects of the postwar "Red Scare" on the lives of American Communists. Simultaneously, by implicitly exposing the propaganda techniques (traditionally right-wing in content) of the American mass media, *Seeing Red* is an act against future McCarthyism. The first several minutes of the movie are packed with data not only about the film's subject, but also about the stance of the film-makers, Julia Reichert and James Klein. The opening Eisensteinian historical montage actively involves the viewer in determining the meanings of the juxtaposed images; then, a contemporary sequence finds Reichert on the telephone, trying to set up an interview with some still-frightened ex-Red. When we later hear the disembodied "documentary narration" voiceover, we recognize the voice as Reichert's, not God's.

In this context, the opening montage implies a leftist sensibility, while the revealed presence of the film-maker implies a nonauthoritarian, anti-Stalinist viewpoint. By contrast, the historic "scenes from the Left" (some accompanied by rousing Red anthems or Depression-era pop, others by inflammatory newsreel narration) show an ironic disparity between what newsreels show and what they say they are showing. Unlike Reichert, the Voice of America dares not reveal its face.

The aging present and former Communists interviewed here prove engaging characters—witty, vivid, amusingly profane. When probed about the contradiction between their democratic ideals and Stalinist totalitarianism, they confess to an honest but guiltless agony; the postwar witch-hunts had far less effect on their loyalties than did Khrushchev's relevations of the horrors of Stalin's regime, which caused a mass defection from the Party. The passionate truthfulness of these old Reds appears in sharp relief against clips of the coolly opportunistic Cold Warriors (Truman, Nixon, Humphrey, et al.) who talked very clean and played very dirty.

The interview subjects do seem to have been selected for wit and sheer niceness, and one can't help but wish that more pointed questions had been asked of those who remain Party members today; nonetheless, the film-makers' attitude seems personally sympathetic but politically objective. Reichert and Klein have come to explore their subject, not to praise (or scold), and can scarcely be blamed for discovering that the Party was made of human beings, rather than horned monsters.

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Books

STEINBECK AND FILM

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In this interesting study of failure, Joseph Millichap has resisted the enthusiast's urge to rationalize Steinbeck's incapacity to produce a single "great" film around the clichés of directors or studios abusing a literary genius. Millichap is as critical of Steinbeck's writing as of the films it inspired, and his sober, steady academic approach neither vilifies nor glorifies the man who won a Nobel Prize for literature in 1962.

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Millichap approaches Steinbeck's work chronologically and shows how social and political developments impinged on his creative efforts, how success threatened him most of all, and how Hollywood translated the Steinbeck oeuvre and distorted his most powerful elements in favor of the most palatable. For example, even in one of the better adaptations, John Ford's *Grapes of Wrath,* the novel has a migrant worker repeat a landowner's definition of a Red with "A Red is any son-of-a-bitch that wants thirty cents an hour when we're paying twenty-five," but in the film the reply is, "Brother, I don't know."

Such alterations are carefully catalogued and reinforce Millichap's theory that Hollywood's enthusiasm for Steinbeck's work negatively influenced him to produce work to satisfy such enthusiasm, leading to the dreadful *East of Eden,* which Steinbeck himself severely over-rated, according to quotations Millichap has culled from his correspondence and old Warner Brothers premiere hype. "His documentary and realistic insight into America had given way to pretentious allegory and pop psychology," Millichap concludes, restraining himself from the implication that America embraced that self-image by patronizing Steinbeck so shamelessly.

The most interesting passages of the book concern Hitchcock's *Lifeboat,* and Millichap's defense of both Steinbeck's novelette and the allegorical thriller movie portend an invigorating challenge to auteurist criticism. It doesn't pan out, perhaps because the details of such a production history can only be sketched. As a separate study, it would reveal a great deal about both men and the production process of propagandistic World War II Hollywood.

The study is eminently accessible to both literature lovers and cineastes, but the writing falls short of Millichap's deft analysis of Lewis Milestone in the Twayne Series. And the publisher or editor in charge of the book did a miserable job of proof-reading: sentences are incomplete, misspellings abound, and Frederick Ungar is not maintaining its reputation. The last twenty pages have editorial pot-holes that severely rattle Millichap's argument. —KAREN JAEHNE

A NEW DEAL IN ENTERTAINMENT
Warner Brothers in the Thirties

By Nick Roddick. London: British Film Institute, 1983.

Until recently, books touching on Hollywood studios have consisted of movie rundowns, biographies and autobiographies about executives and stars, and tabletop picture volumes, soon to be remaindered. With the current accessibility of archival materials (often truckloads of paper donated to universities for tax writeoffs), more detailed and documented investigations are now appearing, as in the recently deceased Warners script series published by University of Wisconsin Press. *The Velvet Light Trap* has mined several studios over the years in special issues. Studies of Hollywood's economic underpinnings are a bull market now, sometimes allied to ideological readings of American class and cultural history.

Bounded by the Crash and Pearl Harbor, *A New Deal in Entertainment* draws on several of the above approaches. Roddick is complimentary toward semiological and structuralist criticism, but his own technique draws, somewhat piecemeal, from case study, story resumés, and interpretive connections allying Roosevelt's political and Warner Brothers' economic fortunes.

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story resolution, enmeshed by regularized investment and output and bewilderingly complex. In consequence, attributions of individual artistry, ordinary studio history, wide-ranging film theories, and strictly economic studies miss the forest for the trees or the trees for the forest, depending on the path they wander.

Roddick's strategy is broadly to contextualize his period in terms first of Warners' likenesses to the other Hollywood studio systems, then of its untypical interest in journalistic topicalities and its zealous financial efficiencies, the last a likely consequence of Warner family origins. Emphasis rests on studio hierarchy, and because attention often centers on pre- and post-production behaviors, a good deal of time is dedicated to the producer's role, Hal Wallis's in particular. Except for the short time he was deposed by Zanuck, Wallis reigned through the book's time frame. His presence lends a consistency less apparent in some of the other studios.

Roddick's second frame of reference is thirties social history. He locates shifts among films selected for close examination, particularly an evolution from individuals-at-odds-with-society (the gangsters) to individuals-asserting-a-social-conscience (*Black Legion, Sergeant York*), the spectrum rationalized in the language of liberal, i.e. New Deal, capitalism.

Actually, studio chronology is minimal; as much will be found in Charles Higham's *Warner Brothers* (Scribner's 1975) or Clive Hirschhorn's *The Warner Bros Story* (Octopus 1979). Roddick concentrates on a particular body of films, used to support his case respecting actualities of studio production and social significances of plot patterns as Warners stars advanced them. Jettisoning musicals, comedies, horror, the strictly adventure pieces, and teary sentiment (Bette Davis and Al Jolson vehicles), the author singles out crime, biographies, the "socially realistic," costume dramas and prestige productions.

As this material turns increasingly detailed, Roddick becomes interesting. A case history of *Anthony Adverse* follows the best-seller from its purchase through successive script drafts, Hays Office negotiations, tests, budgets, casting, costuming, set design, scheduling, music, editing, advertising and release. The process is described through diary-like entries and excerpts from executive letters and memoranda. In somewhat abbreviated form, *Juarez* is similarly traced.

Otherwise, *A New Deal in Entertainment* consists of plot exigeses. Depending on reader interest, these may hold unexpected value in their detailed summaries of unremarked Warner titles like *Night Nurse, Blessed Event, Hi, Nellie!, The Star Witness, Weary River, Son of the Gods* and *Massacre.* By Roddick's measure, films like these substantiate generalizations about studio output that have been more often based on fewer, selectively detailed productions like *The Public Enemy* and *Little Caesar.*

Where one may quarrel with Roddick is in the kind of use to which he sometimes puts this material. Film descriptions read like story treatments. Except for an exclusive reliance on *New York Times* and *Variety* reviews, little attention pivots on how the films were consumed in theaters, how in fact they were movies, not *Collier's* stories. Does the assignment of *Angels With Dirty Faces* to Michael Curtiz tend really ". . . to tip the balance in the direction of crime melodrama, involving the same focus on individual morality demonstrated through action as Curtiz's film of the same year, *The Adventures of Robin Hood*" (p. 133)? (On page 65, Robin is described as free of a social conscience.)

In sum, Roddick contributes effectively to Warners study by his documented viewings of little-seen movies and by delvings in the Madison, Wisconsin Center for Film and Theater Research. He fails to build those bridges connecting different research methodologies wistfully described in the book's first chapter, but then he never claimed he would. The book's appendices include Warner Brothers' film awards, its main first-run engagements in New York and Los Angeles, and very complete credits for those 68 titles discussed in textual detail.

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In surveying the prose occasioned by Charles Chaplin, David Robinson makes a worthy contribution of his own. His is an historical enterprise that tracks Chaplin's career through "the mirror of opinion," the hundreds of books, monographs, newspaper articles, and interviews whose subject is the man who "created in the silhouette of his tramp the most universal representation of foolish, fallible mankind that human art had ever achieved." Robinson's command of extant materials (his research unearths all significant Charliana this side of laundry lists), his judicious commentaries (he avoids the heady extremes of Gallic reverence and Anglo-American revisionism), and uncluttered rhetoric (he writes well) make what might have become a mere library exercise into a lively and incisive overview of Chaplin and his public.

Opting for the clarity in chronology, Robinson proceeds through Chaplin's career mainly by alternating critical responses ("Opinion of the Twenties," "Opinion of the Thirties," and so on) with concurrent first-person "self-portraits" from the artist himself. A dialogue quickly emerges between the popular artist and his popular audience, a sort-of romance that, in America especially, moved from courtship through consummation to divorce. Pivotal events in the relationship are given due attention: the amazing reception accorded Chaplin's 1921 European homecoming, Louis Delluc's pioneering critical appreciation, *Charlot* (1921), the McCarthy era vilifications, and James Agee's unfailing support for his besieged friend. Along the way, Robinson matter-of-factly clears up confusions over Chaplin's Dickensian upbringing in the streets of London and his music hall apprenticeship with the Karno sketch company.

Not the least of the volume's many virtues is a fine selected bibliography, clean photographic reproduction, and a complete filmography listing the cast credits for Chaplin's early silent films in tabular form, so to better reveal the stock company system at Keystone, Essanay, and First National. Robinson's timing is also fortuitous. The recent release by Kino International of newly struck prints of the entire Chaplin canon should give a deserved boost to *Chaplin: the Mirror of Opinion*—and a swift kick to IBM's cozy co-option. —TOM DOHERTY

JAMES DEAN: AMERICAN ICON

by David Dalton and Ron Cayen. New York: St. Martins Press, 1984. $29.95.

Although he made only three major films before dying in a car crash thirty years ago, James Dean still captivates a large segment of the American popular imagination, as testified to in this sumptuous new book. According to David Dalton (who, to an extent, recycles some of his writing from his earlier Dean biography *The Mutant King*), Dean was the "shapeshifter and matrix of adolescence." Dalton's often elliptical prose describes Dean as a founding father of the postwar youth counterculture; this very familiar case is taken here to some exaggerated lengths and with a sometimes contradictory line of argument.

Dalton goes so far as to quote William Zavatsky's remark that "After him [Dean] came a new world . . . the civil rights movement, Black Power, women's liberation, gay rights." This very messianic view of Dean (and ahistorical analysis of the past three decades of political action) is upset by another side of Dalton's argument: Dean is discussed primarily as a solipsistic and withdrawn figure, an emblem of the fundamentally alienated middle-class youth of postwar suburbia. While it is clear that Dean's persona was in contrast to those of John Wayne and Gary Cooper, the connection between Dean's rebel image and the political activity of the sixties is spelled out only in the most poetic terms. This is not to undercut Dalton's attempt, since obviously on some level the image of Dean, at least for a time, was important to a generation's self-concept. But there are deeper problems with Dalton's approach. He maintains that Dean's real genius was his ability to recreate himself, to deliberately manufacture a persona on

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camera and off. Such a high degree of self-awareness seems undercut by evidence suggesting that Dean was a very troubled young man; neurosis may indeed ultimately account for part of an artist's charisma, but it is something else to say that instability is actually cultivated as the artist's principal craft. Even with understanding Dean's fascination with The Method, this reasoning is hard to accept.

Most important are some profound resonances to this book as cultural object. The reader must attend to the book's *hommage* to a defunct "American rebelliousness" (the phrase used by Carter to eulogize Elvis Presley); the springs that make this book work depend, it would seem, on Fredric Jameson's notion of the loss of the American radical past, since the ideals for which James Dean presumably stood exist now only in abstraction or, in Jean Baudrillard's term, simulation. There is no irony in seeing Martin Sheen's name at the bottom of the book's preface—he is the most gifted in a long line of Dean simulations. Sheen's work in *Badlands* and *Apocalypse Now* demonstrated the gradual disappearance of the brooding rebel myth by the process of allusion, of naming the myth itself. Yet Sheen is a vital, talented actor with sufficient connections to the rebel sixties; what is traumatic is the proliferation of Dean clones (Matt Dillon, et al.) who serve to remind us how distant the myth really is.

The book's text and Ron Cayen's superb graphics evidence a "nostalgia mode" (again, Jameson's term) that is as disturbing as it is seductive. With its Andy Warhol dustjacket and coffee-table format, it is really an attempt to validate rather than deconstruct Dean fetishism. The concluding chapters on the hysteria following the car crash and the rise of a Dean industry totally ignore the fact that the book's very reason for being is *contemporary* cultism, but one of a very different character from that of the heyday of youth rebellion. The burgeoning poster/postcard/souvenir industry centered on Presley, Dean, Brando, and others suggests a bizarre form of cultural archeology. This is the situation of postmodernism wherein, as Christopher Lasch has remarked, nostalgia operates not to recapture the past but to reaffirm our distance from it. Porcelain masks of Dean can exist in gift shops since the period of optimism and rebellion embodied in Dean may as well be pre-Hellenic Greece. In the current context, the Dalton-Cayen book foregrounds the *absence* of everything essential to Dean as we finish out the Reagan era. If we accept James Dean as icon, we must speculate on how his myth has been left to petrify into commodity within the media vacuum.

—CHRISTOPHER SHARRETT

THE FIGURE IN FILM

By N. Roy Clifton. Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1983.

It's a nostalgic, forties flashback to come across a film bibliography where Marcus Aurelius nests between Arnheim and Balázs. The book's author is a Canadian lawyer and educator. His work consists of systematized entries that itemize, with examples, employments of rhetorical and allied speechlike arrangements that might be described as movie analogues. Thus we consider, sequentially, figures of association, of contrast, of omission, and of sequence, followed by two catch-all entries: Specific Areas of Use (Sound, Inner States) and Less Common Uses (Minor figures, Fantasy—Allegory—Abstraction).

The attraction of such an approach rests in promises to articulate states of meaning thus far less accessible to semiotics, some of those fleeting moments on which we base part of our deepest movie pleasures. Except for tonguetwisters like Anadiplosis and Epitrochasmus, the writer's language is also couched in blissfully concise English.

Nonetheless, although he draws on a remarkable background of film viewing, from Méliès to Menzel, from Porter to Parazhdanov, the discoveries of Clifton's system read with hardly more depth and insight than any customary descriptions except for the logic of their topical arrangements. Again we meet the split screens of Vertov and Gance (Simultaneous Repetition), camera movements across still photographs in *City of Gold* (Panoramic Shots V) and Auden's rhythmic commentary to *Night Mail* (Sound as Sound—Nonomatopoeia). To be sure, this 347-page volume contains far more, often unfamiliar, examples, but the sameness of their unevaluated "meanings" seems to militate against a system prone to tease out the aesthetically

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Under The Limits of Ellipsis (pp. 221-3), Clifton is frustrated by the apparent randomness of Arthur Lipsett's *21-87*. It's surprising that he didn't consider parataxis: the placing together of clauses, sentences or phrases without a conjunctive word. —JOHN FELL

THE FILM AUDIENCE: AN INTERNATIONAL BIBLIOGRAPHY OF RESEARCH

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—KAREN JAEHNE

PROPAGANDA AND THE GERMAN CINEMA, 1933-1945

By David Welch. New York: Oxford University Press, 1983.

NEW GERMAN CINEMA

By James Franklin. Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1983.

In 1927, press baron and reactionary leader of the National Conservative Party Alfred Hugenberg bought out the prestigious German film company, UFA. This enabled the Nazi party to distribute its propaganda via the elaborate system of UFA-owned cinemas and in the UFA newsreels. The propaganda films were to come later, along with the restructuring of the German film industry under the authority of Joseph Goebbels and

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his Reich-Ministry for Public Information and Propaganda. The disintegration of German Expressionism into insidious Nazi propaganda is a horror story that has been told often but never as well as by David Welch, who surpasses David Hull's *Film in the Third Reich* and Richard Taylor's *Film Propaganda: Soviet Russia and Nazi Germany* in at least three ways.

Welch brings to his study the eyes of a historian rather than a cineaste and examines Nazi film propaganda as a reflection of National Socialist ideology. Hull had focused on a comprehensive recapitulation of the many films made under that regime and did us the service of seeing and reporting on an era of film-making that is virtually unwatchable (both technically and ideologically); Welch does not include every film in his book but he confronts the most unpalatable of them as prototypes for themes and goals of Nazi policy.

Secondly, Welch shows in detail how Goebbels slowly consolidated power from 1926, until in 1932, all party film activities were transferred to Berlin under his control. Very early in 1933, factions of the Nazi party, its self-styled "trade unions," offered some radical solutions to the film industry's problems, among which were the centralization and banning of films that offended the *völkische Weltanschauung* (people's worldview) dictated by party policy. After the party banned all trade unions and Goebbels became Reich Minister for Popular Enlightenment and Propaganda, he was faced with a subtle and complex piece of choreography to bring the rest of the film world under the auspices of the RKK or Reich's Cultural Chamber. One of his first palliative measures was the creation of the *Filmkreditbank* as a provider of credit for the film economy, followed by a reduction of the taxes on film earnings from 11½% to 8%. Goebbels's pose for the next ten years would be one of encouraging "art" and discouraging blatant propaganda, even to the extent of banning "a heroic contemporary film" about a student who joins the SA on the eve of its premier, creaing a *succès de scandale* and pronouncing, "The SA's rightful place is in the streets and not on the cinema screen." Welch provides the detailed research and references to show how Goebbels wielded his power and dictated the criteria for the "revolutionized" if not revolutionary new German films. He declared that the German film had the mission of conquering the world as the vanguard of the Nazi troops, after which "would immortal Germany march once more over the cinema screens of the world." Goebbels's agenda is laid out in all its chilling rationality without, however, allowing Goebbels to become the focus of Welch's account.

The basis or foundation for Third Reich propaganda, as it was to be incorporated in film, was laid down by the Party as "*Blut und Boden*"—"Blood and Soil," meaning racial purity and extending the German Reich to include lands whose productivity would support these imperialist aims. What Heidegger called "the self-assertion of the German spirit" is tracked through some of its more invidious manifestations. Welch gives the necessary historical background for the Germans' belief that the modern world had denied them their mythical unity. In his discussion of Riefenstahl's *Olympiade,* Welch also provides the contemporary reactions to the German obsession with health and hygiene and how it fit into an ideology of nudity that appropriated classical art as well as the archetypal Nordic man. All ugliness was to be erased from the popular consciousness, reports Welch with his unblinking historical perspective, and then allows the films' unmasked ideology to reveal itself as abhorrent and pernicious.

Although Welch must necessarily incorporate in his accouint evidence of anti-Semitism throughout the policies and products of the Reich's Film Chamber, he devotes one chapter, "The Image of the Enemy," to the stereotypes (a term developed by Walter Lippmann to describe the knowledge men think they possess) of the Bolshevik and the Jew as the main target of Nazi invective and violence. Ironically, the first feature film to attack Bolshevism was called *For the Rights of Man* (1934). Goebbels disliked the film because it portrayed the problem as a political division in the Weimar Republic; only an ethnic distinction could guarantee an indelible enemy. It was the blond Aryan versus the subhuman Slav, the "eternal Jew," and the plutocratic English. In 1939, Goeb-

bels forbade the use of the term "anti-Semitic" and replaced it with "defence against the Jews" or "opposition to Jews," who represent "an economic and sexual threat to Western civilization because of their ability to assimilate themselves in different societies."

The propaganda campaign did not rely solely on the films themselves. They were accompanied by directives to the press on interpretation and the use of language. For example, another Goebbelism banned "art criticism" (*Kunstkritik*) in 1936 in favor of "observation of art" (*Kunstbetrachtung*), which permitted evaluation only via description and praise. The reaction of the public was orchestrated through publicity campaigns associating the film with the actual political situation existing at the time and phrased in terms of Nazi ideology. The prestigious "political" films were entrusted only to a group of actors and directors sympathetic to the regime. The filmography reflects a virtual repertory group at work—which had, however, been so cleansed as to be left uninspired and deprived of personal or economic initiative and artistic expression, the result of a formulaic approach to art established when the Reich's Film Chamber was subsumed under the Reich's Cultural Chamber with all its attendant intimidation.

Welch returns at regular intervals to the disagreement between Goebbels and Hitler over the blending of art and propaganda. While Hitler resisted the idea that art and propaganda could be reconciled, Goebbels concern was to prove it could and to create not art, but "entertainment." (Welch does not analyze the musicals and frivolous, frotheir entertainment of that era, because his concern is film in the service of propaganda.) Goebbels preferred comedies and dramatic films, and, in fact, the number of political films declined from 1934–1944. By keeping overt propaganda at a minimum, he was often attacked by other Party members for not glorifying the Nazi movement on film. The visual assault of Nazi pageantry, idealized imagery of the SA and Hitler-Jugend, the apotheosis of Hitler and the creation of Nazi martyrs was not to his liking. Welch quotes Goebbels on subtlety: "If I see a film made with artistic conviction then I will reward its maker. What I do not want to see are films that begin and end with National Socialist parades. Leave them to us, we understand them."

Welch concludes his study of the Nazi propaganda machine and its Rube Goldberg by pointing out that their legacy was "a deep distrust throughout the world of the medium of film and a new awareness of how easily the mass media could be manipulated to serve the opportunist purposes of their masters. . . . Goebbels died leaving a demoralized and declining film industry that would take almost thirty years to rediscover itself."

James Franklin traces that rediscovery from the Oberhausen Manifesto in 1962 to the Hamburg Declaration of 1979 in his introduction. In the remaining chapters devoted to individual auteurs, Franklin shows the personal contributions of Kluge, Herzog, Wenders, Schlöndorff and Syberberg to the recovery of the German film industry. That recovery has been, for the most part, ideological and artistic, since the "industry" is no better off now than in 1944 and the films Franklin discusses are produced by an elaborate system of state and local funding in cooperation with small independent producers with minimal resources. Franklin negotiates the rocks and shoals of the subsidies by avoiding their deeper implications or neglecting to document failures.

The New German film-makers attempted to establish new methods of financing, production, and distribution by means of organizing themselves in co-ops like the Filmverlag der Autoren, founded in the early seventies. Franklin calls it "a noble experiment." It was a clash of creativity whose noblest effort was the omnibus film *Germany in Autumn,* as the film-makers' response to the events of 1978 (the Schleyer kidnapping, the deaths in Stammheim prison and the resulting paranoia of police search and seizure tactics). In the late seventies, press baron and publisher Rudolf Augstein assumed the controlling interest in Filmverlag and its recent history attests to conservative influences and reshufflings to make it financially viable. Some claim the "industry" wants to kill it; others claim, like Franklin, that "directors who produced their own films in the

1960's have gradually been replaced in the 1970's by producers who direct their own films; the ingeniously crafted films of the 1960's and early 1970's are being replaced by larger, safer, and more compromised film productions."

Franklin shows how the young German auteurs eschewed the commercial impulse and developed an intellectual and aestheticized cinema, which threatened, ultimately, to anaesthetize the German film. The political image of the New German film-makers is more visible in their manifestos and interviews, which provide invaluable self-portraits, than in their films, which reflect in recent trends an increasing awareness of audience needs and demands. The demands of the funding institutions are also more acutely felt, as mainstream filmmaking is encouraged and their history of supporting literary adaptations is realized. Franklin traces the logic of the adaptation and evaluates its economic and ideological influence.

Conspicuous by its absence is a chapter on Margarethe von Trotta, whose contribution to the New German films is certainly as great as that of Jean-Marie Straub/Daniele Huillet, who, Franklin admits, are not even Germans. At the very least, Franklin could have done a "collective" chapter on the women of the German cinema, who have the greatest representation in their industry of any in the world: one out of six people behind the camera is female. They have also produced and directed and their product ranks with that of the very fine films being made by Scandinavian feminists.

Franklin does demonstrate a sympathy and concern for German films and their makers that is quite catholic in its taste without being as heretical as its inspiration. The making of the New German Cinema has necessitated governmental boards and funding bodies with a potentially dangerous impact on that cinema, if the new conservative government allows policies to filter down and influence production. The vulnerability of the New German Cinema may prove to be that of the German cinema on the eve of the Third Reich. —KAREN JAEHNE

BRITISH CINEMA AND SOCIETY 1930-1970

By Jeffrey Richards and Anthony Aldgate. Totawa, NJ: Barnes and Noble, 1983. $26.50

The authors' motives are to survey their 40-year period by viewing film as (1) a means of social control; (2) providing images of British society; (3) expressing value systems that may be instructive to or expressive of audience beliefs; (4) conformist in its effects on style, speech and attitudes. "British feature film industry remains virtually virgin territory as far as contextual history is concerned" (p. 7). By and large Richards and Aldgate's methodologies are inadequate to their intentions. No psychological, sociological, technological or political tools are honed sharp for the undertaking, and the book's separately written chapters rise and fall with whatever information supports something more than plot exegeses.

Ten films are studied, intended broadly to include representative genres, studios, political dispositions, original source material and periods. *Sanders of the River* fares well. It nicely connects a popular vision of Empire rule compounded by novelists like Edgar Wallace and P. C. Wren with Conservative Party interest in "a fitting projection of England upon the World's screens" (Sir Stephen Tallents, p. 23). To this is added Alexander Korda's Anglophilic commercialism and Paul Robeson's final dismay.

Other studies are less fortunate. Most sandwich lengthy synopses with footnoted distribution and critical citations, *viz., South Riding, A Canterbury Tale, Fame is the Spur, The Guinea Pig,* and *The Ladykillers. The Life and Death of Colonel Blimp* contributes interesting evidence of the military's unsuccessful, short-term efforts to suppress the Powell-Pressburger film. *I'm All Right Jack* gives useful space to earlier presentations of labor/management dispute, then falls once more into lengthy plot description. *If . . .* again summarizes plot and quotes dialogue without reference to *Zéro de conduite,* obviously relevant. Here as elsewhere, a reader is puzzled by series of seeming-objective estimations that finally effect no successful merger of intention, historical setting, production detail and audience response.

Gleefully quoting estimations from the

1960's have gradually been replaced in the 1970's by producers who direct their own films; the ingeniously crafted films of the 1960's and early 1970's are being replaced by larger, safer, and more compromised film productions."

Franklin shows how the young German auteurs eschewed the commercial impulse and developed an intellectual and aestheticized cinema, which threatened, ultimately, to anaesthetize the German film. The political image of the New German film-makers is more visible in their manifestos and interviews, which provide invaluable self-portraits, than in their films, which reflect in recent trends an increasing awareness of audience needs and demands. The demands of the funding institutions are also more acutely felt, as mainstream filmmaking is encouraged and their history of supporting literary adaptations is realized. Franklin traces the logic of the adaptation and evaluates its economic and ideological influence.

Conspicuous by its absence is a chapter on Margarethe von Trotta, whose contribution to the New German films is certainly as great as that of Jean-Marie Straub/Daniele Huillet, who, Franklin admits, are not even Germans. At the very least, Franklin could have done a "collective" chapter on the women of the German cinema, who have the greatest representation in their industry of any in the world: one out of six people behind the camera is female. They have also produced and directed and their product ranks with that of the very fine films being made by Scandinavian feminists.

Franklin does demonstrate a sympathy and concern for German films and their makers that is quite catholic in its taste without being as heretical as its inspiration. The making of the New German Cinema has necessitated governmental boards and funding bodies with a potentially dangerous impact on that cinema, if the new conservative government allows policies to filter down and influence production. The vulnerability of the New German Cinema may prove to be that of the German cinema on the eve of the Third Reich. —KAREN JAEHNE

BRITISH CINEMA AND SOCIETY 1930-1970

By Jeffrey Richards and Anthony Aldgate. Totawa, NJ: Barnes and Noble, 1983. $26.50

The authors' motives are to survey their 40-year period by viewing film as (1) a means of social control; (2) providing images of British society; (3) expressing value systems that may be instructive to or expressive of audience beliefs; (4) conformist in its effects on style, speech and attitudes. "British feature film industry remains virtually virgin territory as far as contextual history is concerned" (p. 7). By and large Richards and Aldgate's methodologies are inadequate to their intentions. No psychological, sociological, technological or political tools are honed sharp for the undertaking, and the book's separately written chapters rise and fall with whatever information supports something more than plot exegeses.

Ten films are studied, intended broadly to include representative genres, studios, political dispositions, original source material and periods. *Sanders of the River* fares well. It nicely connects a popular vision of Empire rule compounded by novelists like Edgar Wallace and P. C. Wren with Conservative Party interest in "a fitting projection of England upon the World's screens" (Sir Stephen Tallents, p. 23). To this is added Alexander Korda's Anglophilic commercialism and Paul Robeson's final dismay.

Other studies are less fortunate. Most sandwich lengthy synopses with footnoted distribution and critical citations, *viz., South Riding, A Canterbury Tale, Fame is the Spur, The Guinea Pig,* and *The Ladykillers. The Life and Death of Colonel Blimp* contributes interesting evidence of the military's unsuccessful, short-term efforts to suppress the Powell-Pressburger film. *I'm All Right Jack* gives useful space to earlier presentations of labor/management dispute, then falls once more into lengthy plot description. *If . . .* again summarizes plot and quotes dialogue without reference to *Zéro de conduite,* obviously relevant. Here as elsewhere, a reader is puzzled by series of seeming-objective estimations that finally effect no successful merger of intention, historical setting, production detail and audience response.

Gleefully quoting estimations from the

British Board of Film Censors, *British Cinema and Society* does best with *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning*. Nowhere else in the volume is evidence of class-skewed sensibility so vividly set off as when Board readers respond to Alan Sillitoe's script and conjecture on the effect of such language and behavior on audiences. Such "contextualizing" criticism is clearly effective when it has thorough access to production records. When the authors, like the Board readers, fall back to describing movies as "stories" with "characters," it's nakedly insufficient. —JOHN FELL

FILM AND RADIO PROPAGANDA IN WORLD WAR II

K.R.M. Short, ed. Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1983. $23.95.

> Tell all the truth, but tell it slant—
> Success in circuit lies.
>
> —EMILY DICKINSON

Dickinson's quote appears in an essay on the *Why We Fight* series. A few pages later, Alfred Kazin recalls watching *The Battle of Russia* in Winter 1944 at a camp in Southern Illinois. I remember *The Battle of Russia* from Keesler Field in Biloxi, Mississippi, after VJ Day. These trivia may illustrate one of many useful axioms available in this volume: propaganda messages of one period spill over to later times. Elsewhere, Thomas Cripps notes, for example, that melting-pot appeals to black patriotism in Hollywood shorts first identified racism as a wartime phenomenon, but they soon figured in postwar-conscience liberal features, the sort where the lone ethnic wins his spurs. A culmination was Sidney Poitier's Oscar for *Lilies of the Field* in 1963. More militant, a following generation reacted to Hollywood tokenism.

Film & Radio Propaganda in World War II originated at a Lake Como conference. Its fifteen essays emphasize Allied, Italian, Vichy and Japanese materials, hence more familiar Nazi work can be usefully contextualized. David Welch contributes a single, German essay; his book, *Propaganda and the German Cinema 1933-45* is reviewed elsewhere in this issue. Here Welch concentrates on wartime newsreels and notes how Goebbels first lured audiences into theaters with frothy features.

Italians took a similar route, leavened with documentary-styled war films like *La Nava Bianca* (Rossellini, 1941) and *Uomini Sul Fondo* (De Robertis, 1940), less remarked upon roots of neo-realism. Here as elsewhere propaganda and ideology readings blur together. Editor Short's preface proposes that "Nationalism dominates ideology when the chips are down . . ." (p. 11). Clearly the most conscious allegiance between propaganda and ideology has always existed in Soviet film. Sergei Drobashenko, Deputy Director of the Film Art Institute of the State Film Archive of the USSR, introduces his contribution with, "The propagandistic nature of the Soviet cinema, as well as of all the other arts and mass media, was determined by the ideas generated by the October Revolution and the objectives of a socialist transformation of society."

Both hard sell and sources for ideological interpretation are old as the movies. Dewar's Scotch Whisky (International Film Company, 1897) is in the widely circulated *Films of the 1890s*. Elizabeth Strebel, who writes *Vichy Cinema and Propaganda* in this anthology, analyzes British Boer War staged and news footage in *Film Before Griffith* (UC Press, 1983). Radio broadened audience range. Sound film helped to generate theater patrons yet more fully preconditioned to intensified sensory overload. (Leni Riefenstahl once said sound and picture, together, should always equal a hundred percent).

Short's book is full of fascinating material. Like Hollywood, Japan had alternate movie endings, as in *China Night* (1940: in the Chinese version, a Japanese naval officer simply marries a Shanghai orphan. For domestic release, the hero dies on the battlefield and his wife drowns herself).

Unlike Axis consistencies, the multi-party countries and those strategically situated had multi-opinioned propaganda. Occupied France heard Vichy, the Nazi-controlled Paris propaganda machine, and the BBC's French service. By way of its thirties documentarians, Britain's wartime Labour Party opposition to the Tory government used film to prepare for postwar politics. See a 1942 quote from Basil Wright: "Whether you like it or not we are undergoing

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Goldman, Eric A. *Visions, Images, and Dreams: Yiddish Film Past and Present.* Ann Arbor, MI: UMI Research Press, 1983. $39.95. This is a carefully researched history of a little-known sector of the film world, combining information about producers, performers, and audiences with descriptions of films—comparatively few of which have survived. The adventures of marginal companies were often harrowing, but a rich tradition clearly existed here. (One intriguing antecedent to Streisand's *Yentl* was Molly Picon, perhaps the most famous actress of Yiddish cinema, who played a fiddler disguised as a boy in *Yidl mitn Fidl,* 1936.) There was active production in Russia, Poland, and the United States—where a comparative Golden Age occurred in the late thirties, based partly on US and partly European markets. Goldman is strongest on history of production rather than criticism; he does not, unfortunately, really address the interesting questions of the relation between Yiddish theater (including musicals) and its film counterparts—which was clearly a close and productive one. But by 1950 the extermination of nearly six million Yiddish-speaking Jews had brought an end to the Yiddish cinema, though sporadic attempts at using the language are still being made. The author has been working to restore prints, which have been successfully shown in the US and Europe. —E.C.

Lentz, Harris M., III. *Science Fiction, Horror & Fantasy Film and Television Credits.* Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 1983. This two-volume set is really three-or-four-books-in-one. Volume 1 lists genre credits, alphabetically, by actor, (approximately 600 pages worth) and by behind-the-camera personnel (another 125 pages), respectively. Volume 2 features circa 450 pages of cast-and-character (and director) lists for sf, horror, and fantasy movies, title-by-title, then does the same thing for television shows and series (200 *more* pages), minus director indications. Lentz's work is more helpful than one might expect, considering the number of reference books on sf/horror and TV which overlap it. Especially welcome are the main, fantastically extensive *who-played-who* listings—by actor's name in volume one; by title in volume two—for both individual films and individual episodes of TV series. Almost all the titles which you would *count* on finding here are here. An informal check reveals, further, that some titles and names which you might *not* count on finding are indeed here: Lentz scores 7 out of a possible 15 on such intentionally recherché items. Examples: we still don't know who played the monsters in *Lady Frankenstein* (1971); but we now know who the "headless man" in *The Mysterious Doctor* (1943) was—Leo White. Misspellings and typos are, it must be noted, unfortunately prevalent. Lentz gains points by citing the infrequently cited, offbeat psychological drama *Experiment Perilous* (1944), then loses back a few by spelling "Bedereaux," within the entry, three different ways—all three *wrong*. . . . Still, this is, essentially—despite its one serious limitation—a most useful book. —DON WILLIS

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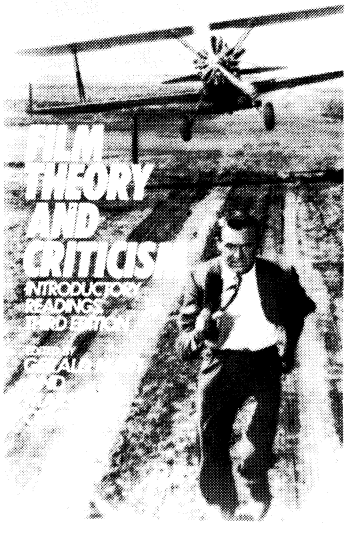

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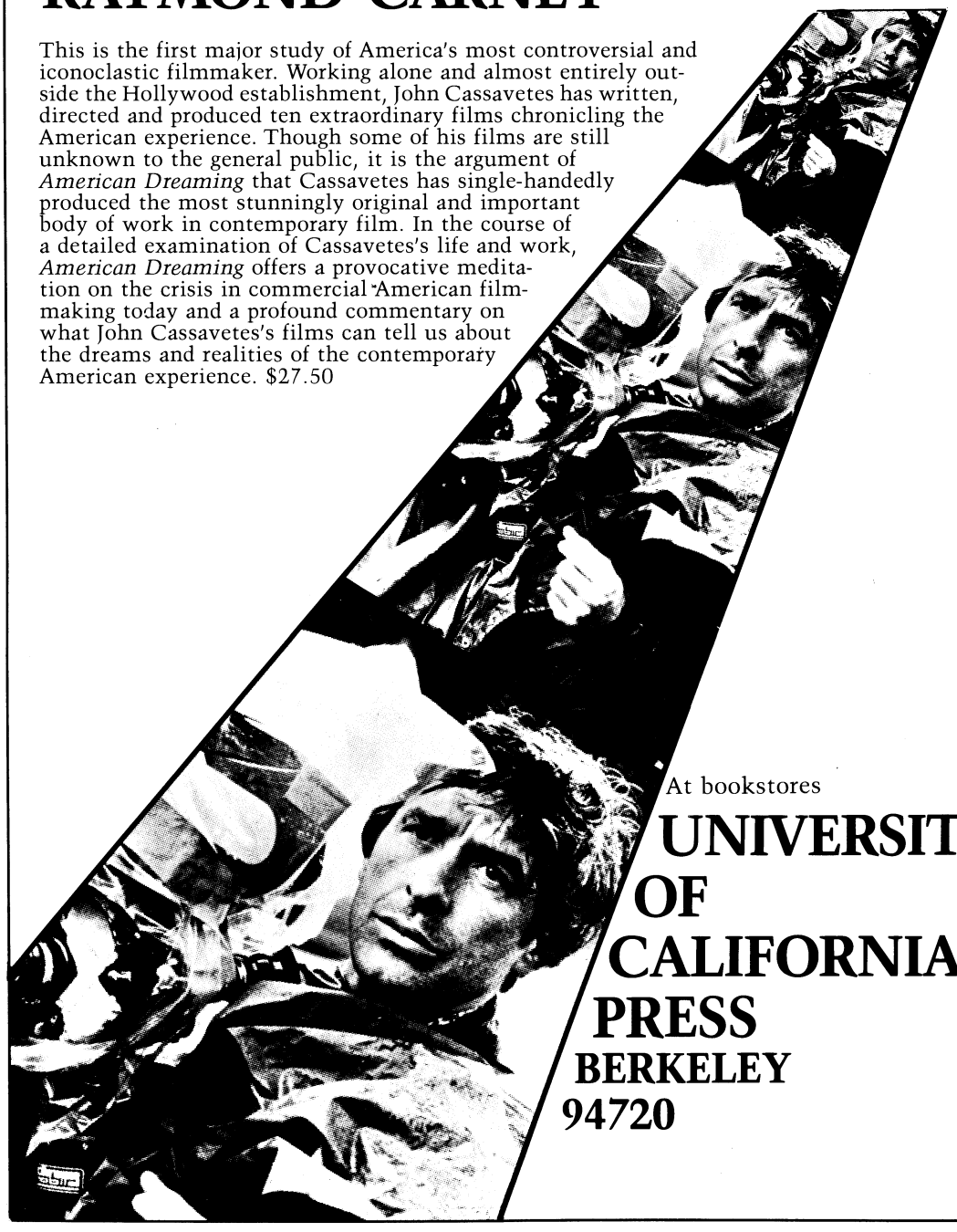

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